20th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

MAGE

THE ASCENSION

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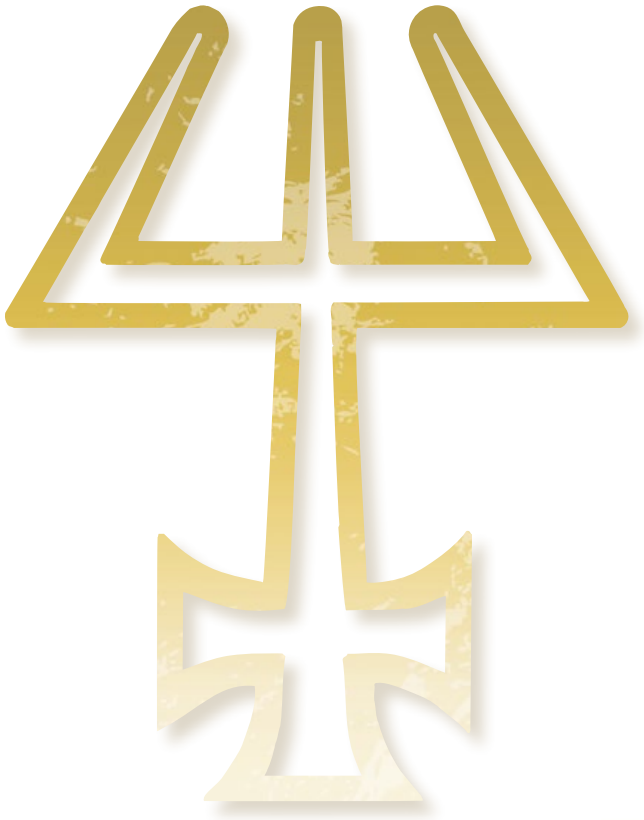


No Fear is There for the Wide-Awake

If, with perceptions polluted, one speaks or acts,
Thence suffering follows
As a wheel the draught-ox's foot.
– The *Dhammapada*, Chapter I: The Pairs, Verse 1

Johnny

There's a boy on a boat in a purple sky, where the air flashes like catastrophic dragons and a patch-eyed man lays a heavy hand on that boy's shoulder and tells him This is where the world dies, son.

...but this isn't the way it happened at all...

From the edge of the boat, I gaze into the Abyss. I'd like to think it gazes back, but all I feel is vast indifference. This, then, is the legacy of truth: Everything I have known, was a lie.

"Johnny!" cries the Patch-Man, his black boots gleaming with the ending of our world. I refuse to answer him. If this is where it ends, or starts, I want to be alone when it does.

But the Patch-Man grabs me by the arm so hard I feel things break inside. His familiar face ripples in the purple light, contorted to a waxy sheen where falling stars reflect their dying selves.

He shakes me and my left arm stretches in some slow-motion taffy-pull, then pops off suddenly, leaving floating globes of bright red blood behind. I howl butterflies as my jaws stretch out toward the corners of the clouds. The ship veers suddenly at an impossible pitch, tossing us into the flashing purple skies.

"Here," she says, reaching out her hand – a girl with eyes as old as time.

From horizon to horizon, the sky goes dark, closing like the eye of God.

"You're still mine, Johnny!" yells the Patch-Eyed Man My Father as he drifts into the dark and is gone.

Ekstatikos

Fuck, but my head hurts.

All of me hurts, actually. *Lee Ann dearest, perhaps you're finally getting too old for this shit.*

That's ridiculous, of course. *You're only as old as you think you are*, the saying goes, and I realized a long time ago that that was true.

Going by the calendar, I look younger than I am, feel older than I am, and stopped aging a long time ago. The play of years on human calendars is a trick of the light – one of the first tricks I'd learned to turn on its back.

Like a stranded turtle, Time kicks its legs but goes nowhere unless I choose to pick it up and set it on its expected path again.

Every so often, though, that turtle knocks you down and tramples you flat with all four feet. I feel like that this morning, and I'm not quite sure why.

It's not the dancing. I'm used to that. Or the hike – that's my favorite thing in the world, except maybe dancing. It's not the sex, though gods know it was passionate enough.

The storm is in my bones. Then, now, and always.

Well, yeah. That would explain a lot.

Lightning flickers underneath my skin – needles, tongues, fingers, fists, a rush of stars exploding into nova to blot out the thrusting of my father's cock – but all those eternal Nows are distant to the person in my skin today. We shed our skins like serpents, washing through the molecules every seven years until only memories hold the energy of what we are together in a construct I call Me. I can *choose* which Now I live in, and so as much compassion as I hold for the little Me's that I have been, I'm not that person anymore. Right here – *this* now, *this* Me – is the only one I want to be.

Although I *could* do without the headache...

A mental shrug, and it's gone.

Still... huh. It was there for a *reason*, so...

Time to check things out.

Shutting my eyes, I let the pain ease back into my skull, then expand my senses out beyond that pain, beyond my skin, beyond Ryk's sleeping body and our tent, out into the dirt and trees and coiled power of the forest and the mountaintop. The essence of the breeze and every dancing drop of water in the mist.

Oh.

Him.

What's HE doing here?

I guess I'll go find out.

Slipping out from under Ryk, I savor the glide of skin over skin, the little hairs across his arms and chest, the puff of living chemistry in this stranger's morning-breath. The tent still smells like sex, like *us*, so powerfully that for an endless instant I fall back into the scratch and push of last night's rituals. It'd be nice to hang forever in those moments, but I've apparently got shit to do outside. So leaving a little bit of dream inside his head, I push Ryk deeper into Maya's domains. He's still asleep, so I'll leave him asleep. If I need Ryk later, I can wake him from a distance without making a sound.

Right now, though, I think this visit's just about *me*.

Courage

She's Awake.

A miserable scrap of smack-addicted wreckage, but the signs are obvious. The smeared remains of what used to be her teacher attest to the efficiency of his methods… and to their results. I had planned to dispose of him myself, but I can't say I'm sorry to have been saved the trouble. The paperwork, though, will be a pain.

Initial VDAS scans reveal a latticework of minor spells - blood-work, mostly, and a petty example of it too. Rats, a few alley-cats, no sight of the missing children our reports had spoken of. As usual, popular hysteria exaggerates the facts at hand. Still, our sources are expected to be more accurate. I make a mental note to emphasize reliable re-

porting in our future briefings. This could easily have turned out worse instead of better.

The girl's trembling. I'm not surprised. December in New York is no place for frayed cutoffs and a cropped Ramones T-shirt. The only heat in this manure pile comes from inside bottles and bags. The heroin should numb her, but this girl is not numb. Despite the crop of needle-marks across both arms (beginning an abscess, I note, in the crook of her left elbow), her eyes register as lucid - not drugged, not even in shock, but bright with a clarity that comes from Enlightenment, not intoxication. The shivering, then, is emotional. And with her former friend providing decorations for this graffiti-scarred hellhole, I can easily see why. After all, she's the one who killed him.

Ohfuckohfuckohfuckohfuck… Her string of syllables becomes a single word, plaintive of tone, devoid of substance other than fear. Glancing over to Agent Briggs (a new-generation example of the Parkinson strain, with dark skin, cropped hair, and a decidedly feminine build that would have been unthinkable in our ranks during my initial Processing), I scan the occultist trash for signs of children or items of authentic paranormal value.

Nothing. All significant risks of Deviance died with the organic finger-painting on the wall.

Agent Briggs glances back to me, her face betraying nothing that an unskilled eye could read. *My* eyes, of course, are not unskilled. *What should we do with her?* Briggs asks without making a sound. The "her" in question is obvious.

Reading our silence, the girl goes quiet too.

A blink of my eyes activates a temporal-probabilities scan. Tiny numbers flash near the corner of my left eye. Faint green traceries skim across the shivering girl. The VDAS datacrawl begins:

NAME: LAURIE ANN MILLER-CHASE

DOB: 5/6/1974 CE

AG: 17.127

HT: 158.242

WT: 42.63768278

MISSING - SUSPECTED RUNAWAY

The datacrawl moves by: Facts, numbers, estimations, probabilities, mechanical prognostications for one scared mess of a girl.

Finally, the one I'm looking for:

RD%: 96.045763946352

Hmmmm.

There was a time when I would have shot this girl on sight. Under hot lights, I took her kind apart, synapse by synapse. I beat them bloody with skillful fists, sent hot projectiles tearing through their organs and skeletal structures until their vital processes ceased. This was not simply my duty (although it was) or my privilege (which, again, it often was) or my last resort on a menu of less-attractive options. I must confess, if only to my private internal jury, that I enjoyed it.

That has changed.

One simple motion of my chin signals Agent Briggs to my intentions.

An almost imperceptible tilt of her head questions my decision.

The merest tightening of my eyebrows reminds her who among us holds seniority.

Silence in the room, broken only by hissing candle wax and the dripping of a once-human masterpiece.

Finally, the girl speaks up, her voice just above a whisper: "You're not cops, are you?"

I resist the urge to quote a well-known film. Instead, I simply tell her No.

Presence

Sliding from the tent's warm shelter feels like an act of sacrifice. Throughout the clearing, a cold cloak of early morning mist shimmers with the light of a distant sun. Thunder burns across the break of dark and dawn, the grumpy roll of elements in their beds. Stretching out the morning stiffness, I zip up the tent door, plant my feet in the dirt, shut my eyes, and reach my arms to the hidden sky.

Off to the side, hidden by the mist, he's there. A dense presence, more solid than the hills. Without turning to look at him, I reach tendrils of perception out across the space between us. He's alone, as usual. I smile at the thought of the mud on his shoes. My own feet, rich with trail-dirt, pad lightly on the rain-thick soil. Through my soles, the earth welcomes dawn. I'm in my element here. He's not. Still, it's never smart to turn your back on his kind.

So, of course, I do.

When people think of "magic," they envision wands and circles and all that ritual stuff. And they're not wrong — not all the time. To me, though, magick is the pulse of life. Rain on skin, dirt underfoot, Nature speaking in a storm. It's not *his* kind of magic, though. His world doesn't *have* magic... until it *does*... and then, it needs another name.

Deviance.

Well, I've certainly been accused of *that* before.

The creak across my muscles as I stretch reminds me I am mortal. Still, the play of chilled breeze and dew across my skin, the earth-pulse, the wash of possibilities contained in every molecule of mist, help me reach beyond my human frame. I am soil. I am flies. I am water trickling in a stream nearby. I'm the trees. I'm even *him*. He occupies space like a blank block of nothing, but we're still bonded in the unity of All.

"You can stop pretending you don't see me," he says in that bleak monotone of his. "That's insulting to both of us."

"You can stop looming, John. It's not polite."

In the dark behind my eyes, I feel him frown. "I see you dressed for the occasion."

"Isn't it fitting?" I say, opening my eyes at last. "You've dressed enough for us both."

He's not behind me now. He's in front of me without having walked across the distance, dew sheened on his trench coat, mud caked on his shoes.

"What are you *grinning* at, Lee Ann?"

"Me? Just happy to see an old friend."

His mirrorshades reflect two Me's back at myself. He's not smiling anymore. "Spare me."

"I knew your shoes would get muddy out here. I find that funny."

"Why?"

"It doesn't fit your image."

I can't lie — he still scares me. That black solidity with the presence of a mountain and the grace of a greased tiger. If John Courage wanted me dead, though, I'd have never left that loft over 20 years ago. And since then, we've both had reasons to be glad I did.

"Do I have an 'image,' Ms. Milner?"

I reach out and press my palm against his chest. It's like touching leather-wrapped ice. He doesn't move. I get nothing off of him at all. Sigh. Typical. "You're so *much* image, John," I tell him, "that I'm not sure that even *you* know who's really you."

Swallow

"Get up, Johnny!"

There are no patches on my father's eyes. Whatever scars he has, he holds inside. I have to guess his moods from tiny cues: The dilation of one eye. The clutch of fingertips. The chemical combustion of his breath. From them, I learn the importance of details and the cost of inattention.

"Get UP, you little pussy. Get out of that bed."

The covers feel warm and heavy and safe. It's cold enough to snow outside. I remember watching flakes of snow drifting past my window in the night, lit up by the porch light and the streetlamps by our home.

"Get out of that bed. Now."

I slide from beneath the covers, my feet landing hard on the rough green carpet. The hallway light behind him turns my father to black stone. My eyes close in the bright spill from the hallway.

"Open your eyes and look at me."

I do.

From where I stand, he seems like an endless tower. Glaring down at me, my father's face darkens to a ruddy thundercloud.

"Wipe that smirk off your face, little man."

...this isn't how it happened, either...

And then the lightning strikes me, slamming me back against the bed.

Stars and fireflies spin across my sight. My head seems to swell, a balloon full of blood.

"That'll teach you," he growls, "to sneak off to bed when you haven't done your chores."

I try to speak, but my mouth won't move right.

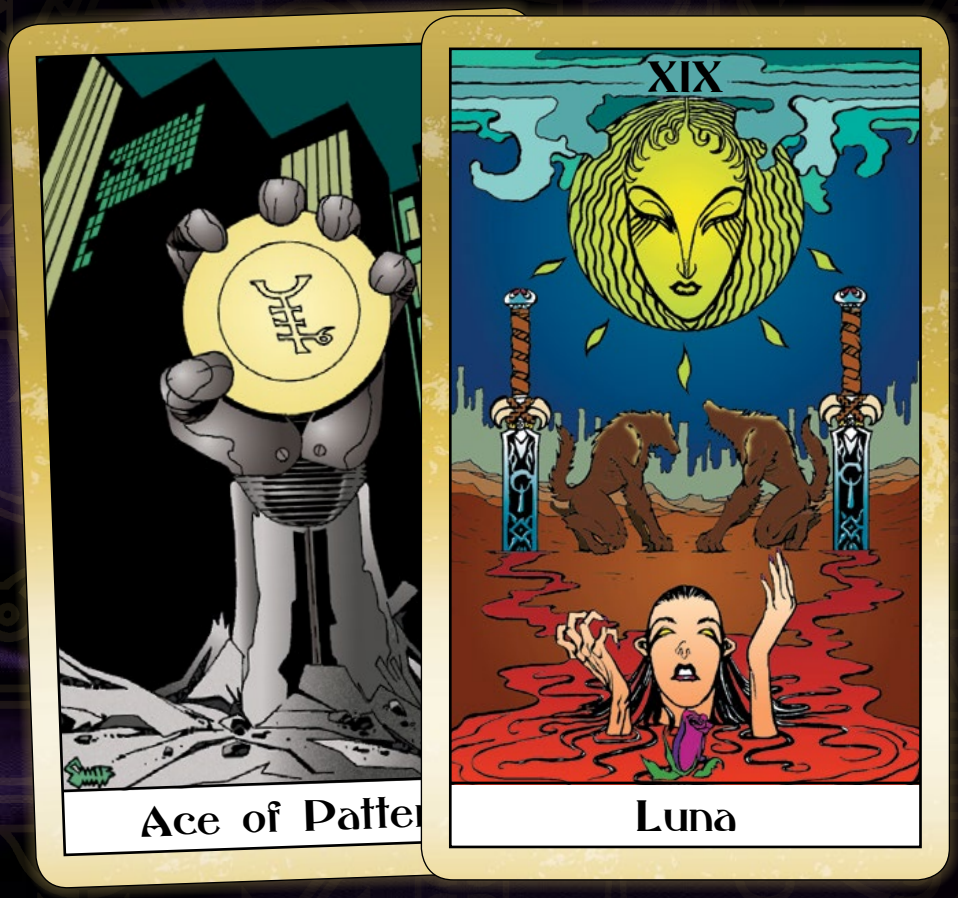
"You talking back to me, little man?"

He picks me up by the hair and holds me at arm's length as I go limp. His fingers dig into my scalp. My weight pulls again the short hair in his fist. I can feel my skin straining against my tiny skull. His hands are big enough to crush my head, I think. Big enough to crumple me up like a paper ball.

As I hang there, trying not to kick or cry or fight, his fingers seem to thicken and spread across the top of my head and then flow down the sides of my skull and into my mouth and ears and nose and eyes. I am swallowed by his thick and sweaty and calloused hands. Into his voice, I disappear.

...I don't think that's how it happened, John...

Of that, I am certain. But if this didn't, then what DID?



Assessment

"I'm sorry," he says, "about Charlie."

"A little late now," I reply, "isn't it?" Bitter much, Lee Ann?

"Very late," John agrees. His voice holds a hint of sadness. "And I should have said something sooner. I did what I could when I knew, but..."

"Let's not." A sharp twist in my chest. I keep my palm in place on his own chest. He doesn't move it. He could if he wanted to.

"It's old history," I say eventually. "Not why you're here now."

"No. No, it's not." That sense of sadness tightens into something else, then abruptly disappears. He's shielding against me, big-time.

"So why *are* you here, John?" His stillness inspires a bit of edge in my voice. It's disconcerting, and he knows it. That's part of his endless bag of tricks. I step back and flex a crick out of my hip.

"We need to talk."

"Well, obviously. The great outdoors is not your style."

My right knee pops, the sound loud against the quiet dawn.

From across the clearing, I feel Ryk stir in his sleep.

"You're not alone here," John says. "Is he...?"

"One of us? No. Just someone I met on the Trail." I sense John's disapproval. "Oh, *please*," I reply. "You're a Black Suit, not a Puritan."

"I don't trust random elements."

"'Trail magic' isn't always random."

"That's exactly what concerns me."

Well, I can't argue with that. Paranoia — especially on his end — is just an innate part of the game. Closing my eyes, I send a brief touch back into the tent. Ryk's still asleep in all meanings of that word. Opening my eyes again, I tell John: "He won't be bothering us."

"That sounds certain." A dry hint of humor there.

"I am," I tell him.

"Good."

"So... why'd you come to *me*?"

"Why do you think?"

"That's not an answer."

He doesn't offer one. Behind those glasses, his eyes don't blink.

The glasses... I reach a little further, past the mirrors...

I thought so: "You turned off your datacrawl."

"Perceptive, Ms. Milner."

"You *never* turn off the datacrawl."

His lips tighten into the sort of grim smile an inexperienced sculptor might chip into a granite face. "Do I *never*? Are you sure?"

"Fine, then." I half-turn away. "Be elusive. I've got other company who's more amenable to conversation."

"Lee Ann." His voice stops me.

It's not a command. It's...

Oh.

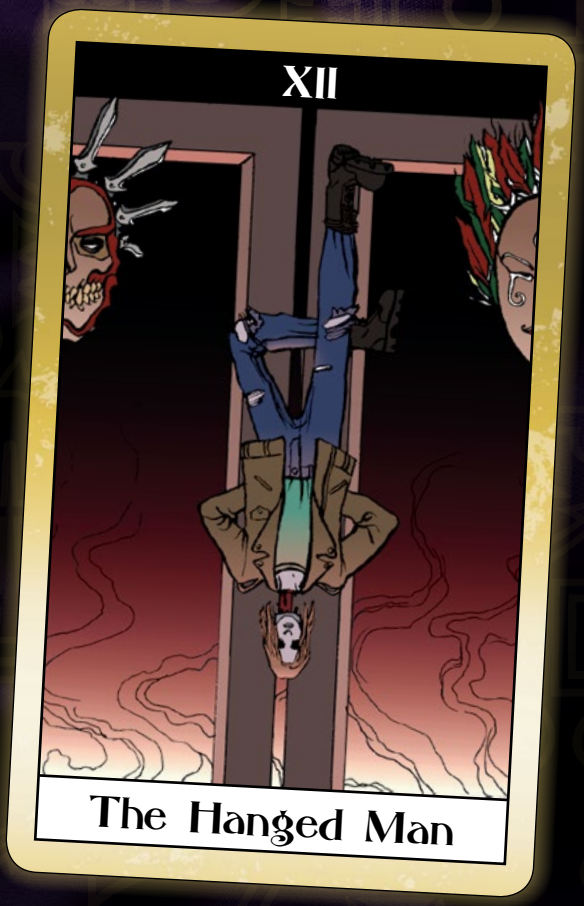
Oh crap.

Mentally, I shrug a little bit more sleep into Ryk. He won't wake up now unless I want him to. Through the bond we share, I send him nice dreams to keep him occupied.

"Okay, John." I turn back toward Agent Courage. He's over a head taller than I am, but I face him as an equal. "Stop fencing with me. Level with me, or go away."

Break

There's a cold chair in a white room. There's a man strapped to that chair. There are two other men, and a woman, standing near that chair. The lights go out. The pain begins.



Good gods, John. What did they DO to you? And how many times?

...this isn't how it happened...

Are you sure?

...not entirely, no.

In that loft in 1991, I assessed probabilities and came to a decision. That shaking scrap of human trash would become a Deviant - was *already* one, by all manners of assessment. It was my duty to bring her in for Processing.

And I did not.

Lee Ann Milner, by any other name, would never be one of ours. We could *break* her easily, but never *own* her. Without intervention, she would become a hazard. Without guidance, she would become an atrocity. But our path was not her path. It would break her and spill out everything worth saving. After we had tried, and failed, to Process her, Laurie Anne Miller-Chase would join the typing pool - another cog, an empty, bland-faced shell of the ruins of the Masses.

So I broke that destiny instead.

I took her to Charlie. An ally. A Deviant. Like her.

It was not something I did lightly, nor without consequences.

But in the years since then, I have not regretted that decision.

Will I do so now?

My own assessments are inconclusive. The data is corrupt. Too many random factors and too much forged information skew the results of careful probability.

The conclusions I do have, however, are… unthinkable.

And unthinkable conclusions require unthinkable solutions.

To fight madness, ally with madness. "Go over the line," as the saying goes. Find the key to probabilities in a nude woman in the wilderness. To skirt obstacles, choose a different road. Or go off the roads entirely, find new data, reconfigure the assessments, and then build a different road, *ex histanai*: out of place, beyond boundaries. Deranged.

Madness as an ally against madness.

Bond

"Level with me, John." Mirror his stance. Stand like he stands, breathe like he breathes. Forge invisible bonds between us through shared physicality. Use art without using the *Arts*. "You're away from cameras, away from crowds, away from the machines and everything you can control." I dig my toes into the mud for emphasis. "You didn't get your shoes muddy for a social call."

"True enough."

I try to read John Courage, but my senses slide off him like rain off that black trench coat. He seems *alien* to the woods, as if someone dropped a four-poster bed on top of Everest. He's shielding from me, that's obvious… and yet…

He's too still. Even by his standards. Rigid.

I look hard at the double-Me's staring back at me from John Courage's mirrorshades. I look past them. I look at the granite expression on his face.

Breathe.

The mist around us thickens to a pearl-shine shell, walling out the world. We slip further than usual from the world outside, and as he senses my spell weaving the mist into protection, the air goes cold.

"You're making a wall," he says.

"We need privacy."

Without moving a muscle, he stiffens. Then those granite features slide toward a frown. His presence hardens to black-hole density.

"It's okay," I promise him. "You could have killed me years ago. I remember that, John. I trust you." I face him dead-on, hands at my sides, no secrets, no sudden moves. Keep using his name to reinforce our bond. "You're not like the others," I say, "and that's the reason I can trust you."

The tension drops a fraction of a notch. "A fair assessment, Laurie Ann. Also mutual."

I smile. He doesn't. "You trusted Charlie," I remind him. "With me. I appreciate that, John, and I swear I won't betray that trust."

"How strong *are* those walls of yours?"

"They're water, John. As strong as they need to be."

"You can stop using my name, Lee Ann. I know that trick."

"Then let's *both* stop using tricks," I tell him. "If you're going to trust me, then please fucking *trust* me."

He nods.

Takes off his mirrored glasses.

Lets down his psychic shields.

Breathe.

"How much do you trust me?"

"More than I should," he says.

Breathe.

Breathe.

Holy shit. He's *scared*. *HE'S* scared.

And that scares *me*.

Inexorable

It's snowing human skin turned to ashes in the flames. Flashes in the smoke end in screams as blasts of energy connect. Some vast coil lifts toward the sky, its source hidden yet horribly revealed by the sheer size of that appendage. The air thickens like a deep-sea scream, oppressed by density and lost in dark.

Stomping through a scorched-bone maze, four warriors of dementia heft their instruments. Spiky armor blends into writhing skins. LED readouts glow green in the umber fallout light. One fires a blast of superheated plasma into a clutch of cowering boys. Another opens her mouth in a shout of triumph, her voice keening like a baby on a grill. The third boils like smoke inside its armor, the lines of that bent carapace blurring into haze. The fourth one unhooks some black shining orb from a webbing belt, and lifts the orb for an overhead throw.

"No. Fucking. Way."

The angry girl with long blonde hair shoves herself upright. Blood streams in thick ribbons across her face. Running her fingers through the blood, she draws fierce designs upon her skin, licks the blood from her hands, and begins to chant. Her words rising into a shrieking mantra of ululating force.

The girl's skin darkens as she starts to dance. Her bare feet stamp the wreckage, ash and bones. Blood-mist surrounds her with crimson constellations, their orbits slowed to infinitesimal clarity. Time grinds its wheels. Slows. Then stops.

The four warriors freeze in place. The air around them pulsates with suspended possibilities. The fourth warrior, arm locked into a frozen instant, stands about a foot away from the airborne orb, its flight arrested by landlocked time.

One word spoken in a flat male voice: "Now."

Showers of fire rush toward the warriors. Full-metal raindrops burst from chattering guns. The bubble of suspended time catches the barrage, slows it to near-stillness…

…and then snaps away with a thunderclap that sends the girl flying backwards across the debris.

The four warriors vanish in a storm of physics gone berserk. Far off, a flash of bright light, followed by concussion. The dark coil surrenders to gravity, shuddering the earth when it falls.

Long minutes pass as time returns to its inexorable flow.

Instruments get corrected. The injured are comforted and the dead are catalogued. Reports beam across virtual horizons. A tall man in a black trench coat stands watch over a flickering pale form.

In time, the flickering eases to an occasional stutter. The girl stirs – now looking more her true age of over 30 years. "*Ow*," she says, squinching her face tight. "I *hate* it when that happens."

"I was beginning to wonder," says the man, "when you were going to wake up."

Lee Ann scowls. "I was beginning to wonder *where* I was going to wake up."

John Courage doesn't move.

"Am I under arrest, officer?" she says.

"Not from me," he replies.

The traces of Kali have fled from Lee Ann Milner's face. The blood stops flowing. She opens her eyes. Behind the lids, her eyes sparkle, silver flecks against a deep blue void. She squints. Opens her eyes wide again. Sighs. Silver tears begin to film across the blue, then spill out and streak across her dirty face. "Damn, that *hurts*," she says, her humor strained by physical, emotional, and existential pain.

"Do you need a doctor?" he asks her, finally.

She shakes her head. "Not one of yours."

"Understood."

"How many dead?"

"A lot. We're compiling reports."

Shaking, she stands. Stretches. He never moves, but scans the landscape from behind his mirrorshades. Lee Ann feels the crackle of electronic ghosts dance around the black-hole density of her periodic ally.

"You've been protecting me," she says.

"You are a valuable resource, Ms. Milner. As you've just demonstrated."

She starts to say something. Stops.

Begins to smile. Stops again.

Closes her silvered eyes.

"Resources," she whispers. "Human resources."

"That's not a term I prefer."

"That's not what I was referring to," Lee Ann says. She juts her chin at the crater where cleanup teams scan for remains of the four warriors. "*They* were the resources."

John Courage says nothing. He doesn't move. A stray breeze rustles across his trench coat, rippling folds of pristine black.

Her silver gaze meets his silver glasses. Neither one of them blinks.

"They were *yours*," she says at least. "They originally came from you."

"No," he replies. "Not from me. Not from *my* people. Never fro

Breathe.

"'*No fear is there*'," he murmurs, looking in my eyes, "'*for the wide-awake/ Who has mind undampened/ And thought unsmitten/ The wholesome and the detrimental left behind.*'"

I blink. "The *Dhammapada?* From a *Technocrat?*"

"Knowledge is knowledge, Ms. Milner," he says. "And technology is more than just machines."

"Good point." Also a good tactic for building trust. Score one for John Courage. "Then you know," I add, "what I'm doing now."

John nods again. "You're building bridges."

"Exactly."

Age doesn't give you wisdom — that's a lie. It gives you perspective, though. Like the view across the mountaintops, it sets you above the forest and trees, to places where horizons jump from end to end across the sky. Above us both, beyond my walls of mist, the sky lightens with the promises of dawn.

I place my right hand in the center of his chest — on *AnDhata*, "the Unstruck," the golden triangle center, lustrous as ten million bolts of lightning. From the darkness of him, a glow of yellow light — unseen by eyes, perceived by spirit.

Breathe.

I reach out with my left hand, placing his own left hand across his heart, across my hand. Take his right hand and

Dawn

I extend my hand up toward him again. Hold my left hand lightly on my chest. Keep my eyes on his eyes. Gaze level. Breathe.

"How *deeply* do you trust me?"

"Enough to be here."

I nod slowly. That's deep enough.

Step toward him on the muddy earth. Again, slowly. Close the gap between us.

"May I?" I ask him, holding my hand an inch above his chest.

A long pause.

Almost imperceptibly, he nods.

He's still. I'm shaking. He could break me just by breathing hard.

slowly place it on the center of my chest. On *AnĐhata*, the Heart-Chakra. Cover his right hand with my left.

Breathe.

No fear is there...

Breathe.

And open...

A flood of tortures. A blur of pains. Worlds severed. Worlds restored. A boy dragged hungry from a screaming bed. A girl pinned weeping to her own. A sky lit stark with white-room flare.

A darkness that engulfs the world.

Shapes in the sky. Live thunderclouds. A tree made of blood in the center of the world. Crowds crushed beneath inexorable darkness. Two children playing in the dust with a skull, their skins burnt raw by incandescent madness.

A light of dawn across the mist. Silver eyes with bloody tears. A loud cough ripped from the heart of the earth.

...that thunder's not a memory, is it, John?...

...no...

...Ryk burning, skin blackened, mouth melted shut too close to scream...

"Fuck!"

They pull apart – a "girl" who's roughly 40, and a Man in Black. Mist walls burn with light brighter than the dawn.

Flames beyond it. Flames and ashes.

"Oh shit." Tears burn unshed in Ecstatic eyes. Mirrored glass slips up to cloak the man's cold gaze. They both look up and around at the flames outside the mist.

"They found us," he says, "more quickly than I had expected."

Ryk's body burns, wrapped in the melted remains of a tent.

Lee Ann's mouth hardens with deadly resolve. "Okay, John," she says. "So how *many* weapons will we need?"

"All of them, Lee Ann," he says. "We're going to need them all."

Introduction: Pride, Power, Paradox

Surely a god hath set his lions loose
And laughs to hear them as they rage afar.
– Charles Leland, *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*

The Art of Change

Magick lives.

The Art of Change never went away. Though the age of sorcerers has faded to mythology, magick holds a real and vibrant role in the world we know.

Don't think so? Look around you. We fly over oceans and look across time. The distance between Dallas and Tokyo can fit in your pocket. You could craft whole worlds out of numbers on a screen, or visit Africa without leaving your chair. If *that's* not magickal, what *is?*

Magick isn't witches on brooms or demons conjured in the night. It *can* be, but it isn't limited to that. Magick is the force of possibility... and now, more than perhaps ever before, it seems as though all things are possible.

And yet we're told that the age of miracles is over. We're living in the End Times, a hopeless grind where novelty is just another pop-up ad. We've been set against one another in a round-robin game of trivial pursuits. The best we can hope for, we are told, is a big house and a warm bed and a bunch of money in the bank. So sit the fuck down, shut the fuck up, have your TV and a Big Mac and think you've got it made.

Bullshit.

Wake up.

Your future's on the table.

There's a war all around you, with Reality itself at stake.

In the neon shadows of a tech-besotted world, there are agents of change fighting to forge your future. Some look like Hogwarts refugees or Terminator clones. Some throw fire or call down storms. Most of them look just like you or me, but looks can be deceiving. Call them mystics. Call them mages. Call them Technocrats or Mad Ones, but don't presume they aren't there.

Because there's a war on. And now you're part of it.

Welcome to the world of **Mage**.

Where Past and Future become Now.

An Intimate Epic

Twenty years ago, a game came along that changed gaming. It was big and epic and confusing as hell. It dared folks to think outside the box – to not simply throw fireballs but to really think about *how* and *why* we do the things we do. Often considered "the thinking gamer's game," **Mage: The Ascension** subverted everything (including itself) while challenging people to make a difference in their world.

And now, more than ever, that challenge stands.

Against the epic tapestry of an Ascension War, **Mage** features architects of reality locked in a battle to see whose future will prevail. But within that sometimes cosmic scope,

Mage asks an intimate question: *If you had the power of a god, what would you do with it... and what would IT do with YOU?*

Regardless of whether you're an old **Mage** fan or a new convert, that question is the heart of the game. Every mage – from a Verbena witch to a Man in Black – is an agent of change, a dynamic hero in a world gone mad. And though that world overflows with cosmic horrors and gunfights in the streets, the biggest enemy you face is despair.

Being a mage means you have options. Hope is never truly gone. If you're clever enough, brave enough, and imaginative enough to change your circumstances, you *can*. That power holds a high price, but it's worth it in the end.

Mage invites you to play dice with the cosmos. To shape Forces and Life and Time. And now, in this Anniversary Edition, you've got more options than ever before.

Then and now, in **Mage**, the magick *matters*... and so do you.

What is a Mage?

Put simply, a mage is a person with the power to reshape reality through force of will. Awakened to their potential, such people believe so strongly in what they do that they literally change their world. With that power, though, comes overwhelming pride, fanaticism, and corruption. That same power of belief often pits mages against one another, against their surroundings, and against themselves as well. Their will to power becomes the power to destroy.

Ideally, mages strive toward a lofty goal: *Ascension*. Problem is, they disagree about what Ascension means. Should it be personal transcendence or universal peace? Does it look like heaven or does it strive against hell? Is magick given by some god, or does it come from deep inside? Will it be magic, faith, or science that makes the world a better place? Everyone's got answers, but no one knows the truth. And so, like religious creeds or political factions, mages fight about their ideals. Out of good intentions, they drag their world toward an abyss.

Who are the bad guys? Who are the good guys? Although *the Technocracy* – a monumental faction of ruthless technomancers – gets stuck with the nickname "black hats and mirrorshades," *all* mages are heroic monsters. Some have more blood on their hands than others, but every one of them holds the seeds of corruption. Through their Ascension War, they've forced their wills upon one another for roughly a thousand years... and as a result, the world has suffered. This paradox – terrible actions for lofty goals – is the price of pride and power.

An Ascension War?

At the center of **Mage**, there's a bitter conflict. That Ascension War provided the framework for previous editions of the game. Four factions – the Traditions, Technocracy, Marauders, and Nephandi – tore their world apart in the name of their ideals. Though the Technocracy appeared to have the upper hand in that struggle... even, in **Mage**'s **Revised Edition**, seemed to win it – this War is far from over. The Ascension War, at its heart, is not about whether magick looks like wizards or TV sets; it's about groups of visionaries so dedicated to their Truth that they'll risk everything to bring it about... and who have, in the process, made a catastrophic mess.

Who are these factions, anyway?

- The **Traditions**, whose devotion to mystic wonder ranges from weird science to bloody rituals.
- The **Technocracy**, dedicated to an orderly world under their command.
- The **Nephandi**, to whom light and hope are the ultimate hypocrisy.
- And the **Marauders**, who see chaos as the ultimate Truth.

Outside these factions, other mages shape their own paths. These **Disparates** refuse to join a side and work instead toward personal power or the welfare of their chosen people.

Do all mages fight this Ascension War? No... but many do, and even those who avoid the War itself feel its effects. That conflict shapes the world as mages know it. Reality itself is both prize and battlefield.

As a mage, then, your challenge is to claim a destiny in this world. You might be a cyborg, a wizard, a street shaman, or a steampunk scientist – the role is up to you. What's important is what you do with it... and again, what *it* does to *you*. Even though big factions fight a battle for reality, a mage is, by her very nature, a force of change.

The ultimate battlefield is *within*.

Your World, Your Choice

Mage: The Ascension has an epic metaplot, with dramatic changes between its previous editions. This **20th Anniversary Edition** features elements of all of them, plus more besides.

Are you stuck with this metaplot? No.

A mage never has to fight in the Ascension War. She never has to visit otherworldly realms. She may never even hear the word "Technocracy." Despite its sweeping mythos, **Mage** isn't about fighting Iteration X in the ruins of Doissetep. It's about saving your world, whatever your world looks like to you.

Horror and Hope in a World of Darkness

A **Mage: The Ascension** chronicle features tales of heroism and atrocity. In this World of Darkness, hope is in short supply. Nights seem darker and more sinister than our own. Screams and gunshots echo through the streets. Gothic cathedrals tower alongside neon Babylons of glass and steel. Nightclubs shake to techno thunder while desperate souls seek solace or oblivion. Drug wars and religious violence spill blood with awful frequency. Legendary monsters hunt their prey, even when such things are supposedly "impossible." People cower in front of TVs and computers, watching events from an anesthetized distance. Churches host fanatic congregations who pray for celestial deliverance, but such deliverance feels very far away. Everything seems *possible* in this world, but the strongest possibility is that everything is *shit*.

This setting hovers somewhere in between the end-of-an-age decadence of the 1990s and the desperate fury of our new millennium; it can be as modern or archaic as you want it to be. Its denizens might own iPhones or scrounge crack in burnt-out neighborhoods. They probably do both. This World of Darkness is both immediate and timeless – a dark satire of our own times.

Like other World of Darkness games, **Mage** has dominant themes and moods:

Theme: Hope and Transformation

Above all other things, **Mage** is about giving a damn. While other folks are hopeless or content enough to accept what they've been given, mages change the picture. They disagree, often violently, about what that picture should look like, but apathy's not in their nature. The Awakening won't *let* them sit still and accept the world as it is.

Mages are power incarnate. What they *will*, will *be*. That power can go to their heads, corrupt them, demolish everything they hold dear... but it's *there*. **Mage**'s dominant theme, then, is *hope*. Things might get bad, even tragic, but the possibility of change never goes away.

That element of *transformation* becomes a second theme in **Mage**. Nothing is set in stone. Everything changes. So-called traditions of mystic art transform, under pressure, into new incarnations of themselves. Stasis, in **Mage**, is an enemy; even the ostensibly static Technocracy is far more dynamic than anyone outside that group might believe. Especially in the 21st century, **Mage** is all about change. Those folks who can't face the future, after all, are bound to disappear.

Mood: Defiance and Reflection

Life sucks... so *FIX* it! That *defiance* forms another dominant mood in **Mage**. Whether you're playing a desperate street kid, an Enlightened CEO, a kung-fu hero, or a classy sorcerer, your

Reality Zones

In our world of fast food and television sets, it's easy to believe that everyone believes a given thing. Fact is, though, that's not *true*. The world's a big place, and anyone who wants to control a global belief system needs to take *all* of it into account.

In **Mage**'s original and **Revised** editions, many things were said about the Technocracy controlling global Reality because no one believes in magic and everyone believes in science. That very cosmopolitan idea, however, has little connection to the actual world.

Beyond the vast numbers of people who live in areas without reliable electricity, phone service, or running water (much less TV or the Internet), there's also the matter of religious belief. The Middle East, for example, continues to be a flashpoint for humanity because large numbers of people from three different religions believe their God gave it to them... and they're willing to end life on Earth to prove that point. Whole regions exist in what could be called *magical cultures*, where mysticism is a fundamental part of everyday life. And even throughout the so-called industrialized world, religious fundamentalists slash science funding and education while New Age metaphysicians, conspiracy theorists, and followers of Earth-based spiritualities (who often belong to those other groups as well) regard science and technology as enemies, not truth.

Is *this* a Technocratic victory? Not even close.

The idea of a single global *paradigm*, or belief system, is very far from reality as we know it. In the World of Darkness, where the forces of faith and the supernatural world are strong, it's even further from reality than in our own. The Technocracy may have declared victory, and industrial-world mystics may even believe them. In truth, though, capital-R Reality is still very much up for grabs.

And so, **Mage 20** continues the idea of magickal geography and influence given in **Mage 2nd Edition** and **Sorcerers Crusade**. In certain zones, technology is the dominant force; in others, religion and tradition hold the upper hand. This way, **Mage** remains a world in flux – and in that regard as well, it's very much like our own.

Storytellers who prefer the Technocratic victory metaplot, however, can completely disregard these zones and run the entire Earth by a single Consensus.

For details about reality zones, see **Chapter Ten**.

world seems intent on fucking you over. Rival cults, hungry spirits, street gangs, and global climate change all threaten your ideals. In **Mage**, you have the power to fight back.

That said, be *careful*. In fighting back, you could become part of the problem you fight to solve. Power is tricky thing: the more you have, the more likely you are to be corrupted by it. As a result, **Mage** often becomes a symbolic hall of mirrors, reflecting people and things back upon themselves, often in distorted and exaggerated forms. Such *reflection* permeates the mood of **Mage**: Technocrats reflect Traditions, Nephandi reflect their rivals, madness mirrors wisdom back into its own face, and mages mirror the world around them – and that world, in turn, mirrors their own deeds. Mages, though human, are monsters too... and the Latin roots of "monster" mean *warning*, *teach*, and *omen*.

Beyond the obvious defiance of external enemies, **Mage** also features the internal struggle between power and its abuse. There's a line, after all, between raging against the machine and becoming *part* of that machine. So are you doomed to be the new boss, same as the old boss, or can you shape a better tomorrow from the ruins of today?

The Various Editions of Mage

Since its appearance in 1993, **Mage: The Ascension** has undergone many transformations of its own:

- **Mage 1st Edition** (the 1993 softcover book) is a four-color reality club sandwich. Cosmic factions duke it out in a realm of metaphysical weirdness. Eventually developing a sense of history and personal scope, the early days of **Mage** concentrate on arcane superpowers. The Technocracy is an evil, soulless entity bent on breaking all Creation to its will, with plucky but disorganized Traditions caught between Dynamism, Stasis, and Entropy.
- **Mage 2nd Edition** (the 1995 hardcover book) invites players to "join the battle for reality!" Narrowing the game's epic scope in favor of more intimate perspectives, this edition alternates between street-level survival tales and otherworldly metaplots. Every faction has a valid

viewpoint, with the Technocracy becoming a ruthless but sincere opposition to the mystic point of view.

- **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** (1998) jumpstarts the Ascension War in the 15th century. Presenting the Traditions and the proto-Technocratic Order of Reason as equal options, **Sorcerers Crusade** favors high fantasy and courtly intrigue.

- **Mage Revised Edition** (1999) presents a melancholy survival feel. The Technocracy has triumphed, mystics have been slaughtered, and the surviving Tradition mages move through an implacable world that prefers apathy over imagination.

- **Dark Ages Mage** (2002) centers on the European medieval era, long before the Ascension War begins. Although the improvisational element remains present in magic, the setting's reality is rooted firmly in European beliefs of that era.

- Both **Ars Magica** (1989) and **Mage: The Awakening** (2004) are distant cousins of **Mage: The Ascension** but remain separate games in their own right. Certain *Ars Magica* setting elements were incorporated into **Ascension**, but those ties were severed very early on.

- **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition** spans all five of the Classic Ascension lines, favoring an inclusive flavor over edition preference. Individual troupes can employ their favorite elements and discard the ones they don't like – a sandbox design concept that remains faithful to **Mage**'s core ideal: *Reality is what you make of it*.

Future Fates

Throughout this book, you'll find references to places, characters, and events that impacted **Mage**'s background history, especially through the 1990s and into the new millennium. Many of these elements have been grouped into *Future Fate sidebars*.

So what does Future Fate *mean*? It means you have three options with regards to your chronicle:

- **These things *will* happen:** The gods have spoken. History is set. In the realm of official history, what's described in these sidebars either *has* occurred, or *will* come to pass, as described.

- **These things *might* happen:** You can pick and choose and perhaps change history. The Storyteller decides what *has*, has not *yet*, or may not *ever* occur. The elements described have an impact on the world, but you decide when and how much impact they have.

- **These things may *never* happen:** Nothing is set. It's all up to you. The people or events in those sidebars could be significant, they might happen very differently, or they might never occur at all. Use, change, or ignore such things as you see fit.

Future Fates leave events like the Avatar Storm or the Horizon War up to individual Storytellers. This way, your group isn't shackled to an official chronology. You might use Time magick to sense impending Future Fates and then change the course of history; meet important figures and guide events in different directions; or simply ignore the whole metaplot and run your tale on your terms. *Players* may not know which course their Storyteller has chosen, but that Storyteller *has* that choice. Ultimately, the truth is up for grabs... which, for **Mage**, is how things should be.

How to Use This Book

For ease and clarity, this monumental tome has been divided into three sections:

Book I: Awaken

An overview of the mage's world, the opening section contains...

- **Chapter One: The Mage's Path**, in which the Greater Arcana map a mage's journey from Awakening to resolution.

- **Chapter Two: Magick: The Art of Reality**, which explores the shapes, forms, and tools of magick.

- **Chapter Three: The Shadow World**, which reveals the world of an average mage.

- **Chapter Four: The Worlds Beyond**, which offers a guided tour through metaphysical Otherworlds.

Book II: Believe

Moving into the meat of the game, the second section features...

- **Chapter Five: Ascension Warriors**, which addresses the many factions and metaplots of the Ascension War.

- **Chapter Six: Creating the Character**, which reveals the stages and Traits involved with character creation.

- **Chapter Seven: Telling the Story**, in which **Mage** Storytellers get practical advice for staging their intimate epics.

Book III: Ascend

The rules of the game can be found in the final section, divided between...

- **Chapter Eight: The Book of Rules**, which covers the essential Storyteller game systems.

- **Chapter Nine: Dramatic Systems**, which explores the rules for specific circumstances.

- **Chapter Ten: The Book of Magick**, in which the Art of Change receives a detailed treatment.
- **Appendix I: Allies and Antagonists** presents an array of templates and characters.
- **Appendix II: Odd Ends** features Merits and Flaws, Advantages, derangements, and a handful of Wonders to enhance your **Mage** chronicle.
- And finally, the book's **Afterwords** conclude the book with a collection of testaments to **Mage**'s enduring legacy.

Yeah, it's a big world... but one no larger than your imagination.

A Sandbox of Potential

The book in your hands is bloody huge. Do you need to know it all, cover-to-cover? No.

Think of **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition** as a sandbox of possibilities for the games you choose to run. These games, or *chronicles*, are your personal creations. Want to challenge Reality to a cross-dimensional chess match? You can. Prefer to focus on a tangled web of dysfunctional romance? You can do that too. Your heroes could help wage a new Ascension War or tend their own business in a world gone mad. This book is a creative toolbox that spans the 22-year run of **Mage: the Ascension**. You don't need to use every option here... but if you want them, *when* you want them, here they are. So do what you Will in your own chronicle. This book can show you how.

Lexicons

Mages are a verbose bunch whose world lends itself to complex descriptors and poetic imagery. Because certain groups employ specific terminology, we've broken this Lexicon down into the appropriate sections. Terms that are referenced in one place (like ***Tradition Terminology***) might also be found under another category (***Technocratic Terminology***).

For group-specific ranks and titles, see the sidebars throughout **Chapter Five**. For the names of various Otherworldly layers and concepts, see **Chapter Four**.

And no, you don't need to know all this stuff in order to play **Mage**. But it helps.

Common Terminology

Many terms reflect common concepts among the Awakened; although most of them have their origins in mystic practices, Technocrats often use these phrases too, if only for clarity's sake.

apprentice: An aspiring or newly *Awakened* mage who's in the early stages of her training. Capitalized, the word becomes a *Council* title for a low-level Tradition mage.

Arcane: Capitalized, Arcane refers to a mysterious field or effect that obscures the existence and identity of a person, place, or thing.

Arete: Commonly pronounced as either *ahr-eh-TAY* or *AIR-eh-tay*, this word reflects the quality of excellence and *Enlightened Will* that allows a mage to alter reality through his *Arts*. (See ***Awakening***, ***gnosis***, ***magick***.)

Art, Arts, the: Common term for magick; also used as a synonym for *Sphere* (eg. the Art of Forces).

Ascension: Transcendence to a higher state of existence. Seen as both a personal goal (in which the mage achieves self-Ascension) and a global one (in which mages elevate humanity as a whole to an Ascended state). Few mages, however, agree about what Ascension actually looks like or what that higher state means. Ascension, then, is more of an ideal than an accomplishment.

Ascension War, the: Centuries-long conflict between Awakened factions that strive to determine the ultimate form of reality on Earth. Supposedly won and lost several times, this goal – like Ascension itself – is more of a nebulous concept than a measurable goal.

astral: Dealing with mystic consciousness, usually when projecting that consciousness beyond the physical form, shaping worlds with consciousness, or both. (See also ***Three Worlds.***)

Avatar: The "inner god" that guides a mage, an Awakened Avatar allows a mage to rework reality. (See ***Genius***, ***Seeking.***)

Awakened, the: Common name for mages in general; also used to refer to *Night-Folk* who also possess paranormal abilities. (See ***Enlightenment***, ***unAwakened.***)

Awakening: The state of waking up to one's power to rework reality and perform *True Magick*.

awareness: Sensitivity to supernatural/ paranormal forces, often experienced as unusually acute perceptions and feelings about things most people cannot see.

belief: The force of faith and conviction that allows a mage to rework reality; even after Awakening, a mage must believe powerfully in *something*. (See ***focus***, ***paradigm***, ***practice***.)

bodhisattva: A profoundly enlightened person – not always a mage –who has decided to stop short of personal *Ascension* in order to help other beings. (See ***Oracle***.)

Burn, the: An explosion of *Paradox* energies.

Bygone: Supposedly mythic creatures, rarely seen on Earth but common in human legendry (dragons, chimeras, unicorns, etc.).

cabal: A small gathering of mages who often work together; a family or clan of associated *willworkers*.

Caern: A *Node* guarded by tribal werewolves.

Chantry: A place where mages make their homes; a mystic stronghold. (See ***Construct.***)

chaos magic(k): Eclectic, unorthodox, personalized, and often improvisational mystic *practice*; despite common misconception, *NOT* magick based on evil forces or malevolent intentions.

chi: Life-essence energy, generated and channeled through various mystic practices; also spelled **ch'i**. (See ***Quintessence***.)

coincidental magick: An act of magick that can be passed off or regarded as some perfectly natural coincidence if witnessed by someone who does not understand or believe in magick. Magick that works within the *dominant paradigm*. (See ***vulgar magick***.)

consensual reality: Reality as most human beings understand it, agree upon it, and experience it. Also called **Earthly reality**. (See ***dominant paradigm***.)

Consensus, the: Common term for reality as most people agree upon reality. Regarded by the *Technocracy* as the ideal, safe state of humanity, though other mages use the term as well. (See ***consensual reality***, ***Masses***, ***paradigm***, ***Sleeper***.)

consor: Old term for a powerful but unAwakened ally. Originated by the Order of Hermes, the term has since passed into common usage.

contrary: *Crazy wisdom* role that reverses expected modes of dress and behavior (often, but not always, though cross-dressing, androgyny, deliberate confusion, backwards speech, saying the opposite of what is meant, etc.) in order to subvert expectations about what is. Sometimes used as an *instrument* for *mystic focus*. (See ***shaman***.)

Construct, construct: Capitalized, refers to a Technocratic base or Horizon Realm; without capitalization, the term refers to an artificially constructed person.

Convention: Capitalized, refers to one or more of the five divisions within the *Technocratic Union*.

Council of Nine Mystic Traditions, the Council: The full title of the Nine *Traditions*, united into a single group; also used to refer to the leadership of that group.

countermagick: Metaphysical dodge in which a mage tries to undo the effects of some other mage's magick before that magick takes effect. (This is more a game term than a setting term; players may use it, but characters rarely, if ever, do.)

Craft: Capitalized, refers to a large sect of allied mages who refuse to join the Traditions, Technocracy, *Marauders*, or *Nephandi*. (See ***Disparates***.)

Creation: When capitalized, the term refers to everything that exists – as in "all of Creation." (See ***Tellurian***.)

crazy wisdom: Overcoming limitations through apparently (and/ or dangerously) irrational actions and behavior. By confronting so-called common sense and social taboos, a practitioner breaks on through boundaries of personal fear and *normative culture*. (See ***contrary***, ***Left-Hand Path***.)

Deep Umbra: The metaphysical aspect of outer space. (See ***Horizon***, ***Void***.)

demon: A malignant and/or *Infernal* spirit.

Descent: Capitalized, the dark mirror of *Ascension*; an ideal of decay, corruption, and oblivion rather than transcendence.

Device: Capitalized, a hypertech gadget that employs independent *Enlightened Procedures*; in mystic terms, a magical item based around technology. (See ***fetish***, ***Talisman***.)

Digital Web: The metaphysical aspect of the Internet, generally considered alive. Also called **netspace** and **Webspace**.

Disconnection: The state of drifting from Earthly existence; suffered by people who travel for too long in the *Otherworlds*.

Disembodiment: An extreme state of *Disconnection*, in which the traveler loses his physical form and exists only as *Ephemera*.

Disparate Alliance: A recent and secretive alliance of *Disparate Crafts*. Currently, this Alliance includes the **Ahl-i-Batin**, **Bata'a**, **Children of Knowledge**, **Hollow Ones**, **Kopa Loei**, **Ngoma**, **Sisters of Hyppolyta**, **Taftani**, **Templars**, **Wu Lung**, and various unaligned **orphans**.

Disparate, Disparates, the: Large sect of unaligned mages; originally an insulting term, reclaimed as a badge of honor. (See ***Craft***, ***orphan***.)

dominant paradigm: What many Sleepers think of as "just the way things are." Mages subvert, transform, and transcend dominant paradigms simply by existing, although some work to reinforce it. (See ***coincidental magick***, ***Technocracy***.)

dynamic reality: Reality in flux; the static state of reality being radically moved or shifted – in short, *magick*. (See ***entropic reality***, ***static reality***, ***Metaphysic Trinity***, and other associated listings.)

Dynamism: Capitalized, the metaphysical force of change within the *Metaphysic Trinity*. Also known as the **Wyld**. (See ***Entropy***, ***Stasis***.)

Earth, Earthly: Capitalized, refers to both the planet and its human-dominated state of reality.

Enlightenment, Enlightened: Capitalized, another term for *Awakening* – commonly but not exclusively used by the Technocracy. In lower case form, enlightenment simply refers to the state of profound understanding.

Enlightened Science: Alteration of apparent reality models based upon advanced scientific principles and understanding; in other words, *technomagick*. (See ***hypertech***, ***Inspired Science***, ***reality physics***.)

entropic reality: Reality in corruption and decay, often as perceived and/ or created by Entropic magicks or other forces from the *Underworld*. (See ***Jhor***.)

Entropy: Capitalized, the metaphysical force of decay through which things pass before being cycled back into *Dynamism*; also the name of the *Sphere* that deals with such forces.

Epiphany: The moment of Awakening; an "*AHA!*" experience that opens the mage's eyes to new potential.

Essence: The personality of an Avatar, defined as either Dynamic, Pattern, Questing, or Primordial; known by Technocrats as an **Eidolon**.

Fallen, the: Euphemism for the *Nephandi* or for other mages who pursue *Descent* instead of Ascension.

familiar: A spirit that has taken on solid form in order to become a mage's companion.

Fetish: Capitalized, an object imbued with a ritual significance and/ or spirit-based powers; in sexual terms, a practice or situation of intense fixation and potentially magickal *focus*.

focus: The combination of *belief*, *practice*, and *instruments* through which a mage focuses her magick. (See ***paradigm***.) (Like *countermagick*, this is more of a game term than a setting term.)

Gate: A temporary magickal bridge between places. (See ***Portal***.)

Gauntlet, the: Metaphysical barrier between Earthly reality and the *Penumbra*.

Genius, the: Capitalized, the Technocratic term for the Avatar.

gnosis: Intuitive and/ or initiated knowledge and *awareness* of the true nature of reality. (Not to be confused with the spiritual awareness Trait in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**.)

Gnosticism: One of various related beliefs about an imperfect Creation that can be transcended through enlightened knowledge/ awareness (*gnosis*) of one's higher state of being.

hedge magician, hedge wizard: Dismissive term for people who use a limited form of magic, as opposed to Sphere-based Arts; sometimes also known as a **sorcerer**. (See ***Sleepwalker***, ***static magic***, ***True Magick***.)

hero: "Someone worth singing about;" a person who steps beyond limits and becomes a legend.

High Ritual Magick: Formalized and elaborate mystic *practice* based upon discipline, accomplishment, scholarship, and control; what people typically think of as wizardry or magic(k). (See ***mage***, ***shaman***, ***technomancer***, ***witch***.)

Horizon, the: A thicker form of *Gauntlet* that surrounds Earth's atmosphere, enclosing the many Otherworlds surrounding Earth. According to theory, there may be another Horizon out beyond the Moon as well.

Horizon Realm: An Otherworldly Realm, typically constructed through powerful magick. Technocratic Realms are called **Horizon Constructs**.

hubris: Overwhelming pride that leads people to excess and ruin.

hypertech: To paraphrase Arthur C. Clarke, sufficiently advanced technology that's indistinguishable from magic; in short, technomagick. (See ***Enlightened Science***, ***Inspired Science***.)

Incarna: A spirit entity of godlike power. (See ***spirit***, ***totem***, ***Umbrood***.)

Infernal: From the Underworld; when capitalized, refers to malevolent and corrupting metaphysical forces or entities. (See ***demon***.)

Infernalist: Someone (not always a mage) who makes pacts with Infernal powers.

Initiate, initiate: A person who has been introduced to the deeper levels of reality and the mystic/ Technocratic cultures involved in it. Sometimes capitalized when referring to a low-ranking mage.

initiation: The introduction, through test and ceremony, of a person into an occult society.

instrument: When referring to magick, an instrument represents the tools and activities involved in a *focus*: *belief* inspires *practice*, which employs *instruments* to provide focus. The Technocracy often calls its instruments **apparatuses**, and many other technomancers use that term as well.

Jhor: Entropic *Resonance*; the death-taint affecting mages who deal intimately with the Underworld and Entropic reality.

Left-Hand Path (LHP): Mystic practices that employ unorthodox and forbidden elements (sex, drugs, violence, intoxication, the breaking of taboos, etc.) as tools for enlightenment; pursuit of rebellion and sensation as opposed to orthodoxy and asceticism. (See ***Right-Hand Path***.)

Mad, the: Euphemism for the *Marauders*.

mage, magus: In Awakened terms, a person who understands how to manipulate reality through force of Enlightened Will; also **True Mage**. From the ancient Persian and Greek terms for a Zoroastrian priest.

magic: Impressive but limited acts of illusion or alteration that fit into *static reality* even though they're apparently supernatural. (See ***hedge magician***, ***static magic***, ***Stasis***.)

magick: The Art and Science of reworking reality through force of Awakened/ Enlightened Will and knowledge; also called **True Magick**. Sometimes spelled without the "k," leading to confusion between Static and Dynamic forms of magic(k).

Marauder, the Marauders: Metaphysical schizophrenics whose impressions of reality are so disconnected from the *Consensus* that they effectively exist in their own reality wells. (See ***Quiet***.)

Masses, the: The majority of human beings; unEnlightened people – that is, *Sleepers*. Originally used by the Technocracy, the term is not exclusive to that group. (See ***mundane***, ***normative culture***.)

meme: An idea, concept, belief, or message that has a life of its own and spreads itself through thoughts and cultures.

Metaphysic Trinity, the: Name for the interplay between the forces of change (Dynamism), form (Stasis), and decay (Entropy). Known by some primal mages as the **Triat** of **Wyld, Weaver, and Wyrm**.

microcosm and macrocosm: The *paradigm* that says that small things mirror larger things and that all things are connected on some level. Epitomized by the saying "As above, so below."

mundane, mundanes: Often refers to a Sleeper or the Masses.

mystic: When used to refer to mages, "mystic" describes *willworkers* with a magickal – as opposed to technological – approach to reality and the Arts.

Mythic Threads: Elements of legend, folklore, and mythology that resonate deep in human consciousness and thus have strong ties to reality even when they seem magical. Tarot cards, astrology, vampires, and demonic possession all hold Mythic Threads. (See ***hypernarrative***.)

Nephandus, Nephandi: "Dark reflection" mages who pursue the Path of Descent; infamous for corruption, temptation, misdirection, and deception.

neotribalist, neotribalism: Person or philosophy based on living outside *normative culture*, typically in tribes of like-minded people; typically embracing postmodernist or modern primitive subcultures and activities (body modification, alternative art festivals, vagabond lifestyles, techno-tribal fashions and rituals, etc.).

Night-Folk, the: Catch-all name for vampires, werewolves, ghosts, and other supernatural/ *paranormal* creatures of the Earthly plane. (See ***Reality Deviant***.)

Node: Knots of primal energy, where *Quintessence* wells up and *Tass* manifests. Nodes often appear in places charged with massive emotional discharges and/ or natural harmony or corruption.

normative culture: Mainstream, normal society within the technological/ industrial world. The *Masses* and the ideas that epitomize them. Typically considered derogatory.

Oracle: Legendary mages who've either Ascended or else stopped just short of Ascension in order to help (or hinder) life on Earth. Often considered a myth. (See ***bodhisattva***.)

Order of Reason, the: Original form of the Technocratic Union, active between 1325 and 1899.

Orphan, orphan: Self-Awakened and/ or unaffiliated mages who pursue their own practices and agendas. Considered dangerous wild cards by the Traditions and Technocracy. The orphan label tends to be capitalized by those factions but not by many other mages, who consider that term to be insulting.

Otherworlds, the: Collective name for the various worlds beyond the Gauntlet. (See ***Three Worlds***, ***Umbra***, etc.)

paradigm: A model of reality that reflects a system of *belief*. (See ***focus***, ***practice***, ***instrument***.)

Paradox: The force of conflicting realities, created when a mage performs magick poorly or overreaches the boundaries of the Consensus; also called the **Paradox Effect**.

Paradox Realm: Small Realm created by the forces of Paradox in order to isolate an offending mage from consensual reality.

Paradox Spirit, Paradox Entity: Bizarre, personified manifestation of *Paradox* that punishes mages who invoke the Paradox Effect; supposedly formed from humanity's collective unconsciousness... or collective nightmares.

paranormal: Catch-all term for uncanny forces, used by people (like Technocrats) who don't like using terms like "magic" or "supernatural."

Path, the: Poetic term for a mage's journey from Awakening to Ascension.

Pattern: Metaphysical form of an object, body, or energy. (See ***Quintessence***.)

Penumbra, the: Spiritual reflection of Earth's material reality, just on the other side of the Gauntlet; perceived and experienced in different ways by different people. (See ***Vidare***.)

Pogrom, the: The Technocracy's violent, systematic purge of *Reality Deviants*; from Russian, "to bring thunder."

Portal: A permanent *Gate*, typically guarded by puzzles, wards, guardian creatures, and/ or other precautions.

posthuman, posthumanism: The stage beyond natural humanity, or the philosophy of transcending humanity, often through technological achievement.

practice: With regards to mages and magick, practice reflects the activities and rituals a mage uses to focus her beliefs; also known as a **magickal style**. (See ***belief***, ***focus***, ***instrument***, ***paradigm***.)

Prime, Primal Force: The essential energy of Creation; also the name of the Sphere that employs those energies. (See ***Quintessence***.)

Procedure: Capitalized, a Technocratic *focus* for *technomagickal* spells.

Pure Ones, the: Legendary beings said to have been angels, splinters of gods, or some other mystic entities. (See ***Avatar***, ***the Wyck***.)

Quiet: A state of metaphysical disconnection and insanity, often caused by overuse of magick. *Marauders* exist in permanent Quiet.

Quintessence: The raw concentrated essence of Creation – its Fifth Essence. Also known as **Primal Force**, Quintessence manifests in *Patterns* through the interplay of *Dynamism* and *Stasis*. (*Entropy* breaks those Patterns down.)

Rashomon Effect, Rashomon Syndrome, the: Term for the realization that everyone has different perceptions of reality, and that no definitive form of reality exists. From the Japanese play and movie of the same name.

Reality: Capitalized, the word refers to a personified or even conscious form of reality – Reality as a *being*, not a state.

Reality Deviant, RD, Deviance: Technocratic terms for entities, acts, and creatures (including mages) who deviate from the Union's ideal form of reality. Originally used only within the Technocracy, the term Reality Deviant has entered wider usage when referring to supernatural enemies.

Realm: Capitalized, refers to a place in the Otherworlds that has consistent identity and form.

Resonance: Metaphysical feedback; traces of past actions and magickal spells. Commonly (and often erroneously) known as **karma**, **Threefold Return**, and **"payback is a bitch."**

Right-Hand Path (RHP): Pursuit of enlightenment and magick through righteous action, virtue, and asceticism in accordance with mortal, divine, or moral laws. Originally referred to one of two different approaches to Tantric Arts, now often applied to reputable forms of magick; opposed to the so-called disreputable *Left-Hand Path*.

ritual: An established series of activities that have a greater purpose behind them. Some rituals are simple (knocking on wood), whereas others are incredibly complex and restricted to certain people (a High Mass).

rote: A time-honored magickal spell.

sanctum: A specially prepared safe, ritual, or laboratory space; sometimes capitalized, especially when referring to a space that has been magickally prepared.

Scientist: Capitalized, refers to high-status Enlightened *technomancers*, especially within the Technocracy and Society of Ether.

Seeking: A mage's *Avatar*-guided internal quest for further enlightenment.

shallowing: Temporary time or area where the Gauntlet thins out, making passage easier between Earth and the Otherworlds.

shaman: Mystic who communicates and intercedes with *spirits*. Originally referring to a specific type of Siberian healer/ seer, the word is now a general term for spirit-oriented "vision-people" who undergo symbolic or literal death-and-rebirth experiences. (See ***totem.***)

Sleeper: A person who has not yet Awakened to the greater scope of reality. (See ***Masses***, ***normative culture***.)

Sleepwalker: Someone who possesses awareness but has not yet fully Awakened; a visionary Sleeper who might possess unusual talents but not Sphere-based magick. (See ***bodhisattva***, ***consor***, ***hedge magician***.)

Solificati, the: Sect of alchemists with an extremely confused history and identity; currently identified with both a Disparate Craft and a House of Hermes.

Spheres, the: Capitalized, refers to the nine elements of reality (or areas of understanding that deal with those elements) through which mages work their Arts. Generally considered to comprise **Correspondence**, **Entropy**, **Forces**, **Life**, **Matter**, **Mind**, **Prime**, **Spirit**, and **Time**, although they are often known by other names within the Technocracy. (See ***Art***, ***Tenth Sphere***.)

spirit: In lower case form, an entity or force from outside material reality; sometimes considered the fifth element, soul essence, or the immaterial energy behind passion and emotion. Capitalized, the Sphere that deals with such energies and entities.

Stasis: The metaphysical principle of form, set in motion by Dynamism and broken down by Entropy. (See ***Metaphysic Trinity***.)

static reality: The momentum of reality, guided by the beliefs of humanity and setting what is possible into the form of what exists. True Magick, by definition, disrupts static reality, reworking it to fit a mage's desires.

Talisman: Capitalized, a magickal item that contains its own mystic power. *(See **Device**, **Fetish**.)*

Tapestry, the: A metaphor for reality.

Tass: Physical form of Quintessence, often coalescing around *Nodes* or in supernatural creatures, taking shapes that seem appropriate to the source in question (toadstools in a forest glade, water in a fountain, blood in a creature's veins, etc.).

Technocracy: In lower case form, a government or philosophy driven by science and industry; capitalized, the short-form name for the *Technocratic Union*.

Technocrat: Lower case, a person devoted to scientific/ technological solutions in government and society; capitalized, a member of the Technocratic Union.

Technocratic Union, the: Powerful faction of Enlightened *technomancers* dedicated to the benevolent domination of humanity. Divided into five *Conventions* – **Iteration X** and the **New World Order**, **Progenitors**, **Syndicate**, and **Void Engineers** – this faction employs invention, subversion, and force in pursuit of global control.

technomagick: Reality-alteration (that is, magick) through a scientific/ technological focus.

technomancer: A mage who employs *technomagick*; from the Greek, "to envision through knowledge-craft/ skillful work." Not capitalized unless it refers to a member of the Technocracy.

Tellurian, the: The whole of reality; all *Creation*.

Tenth Sphere, the: Theoretical unifying principle behind the nine *Spheres*; heavily debated but not yet conclusively discovered.

Three Worlds, the: The three layers of the Otherworldly *Umbrae*; regions of consciousness (the *Astral*, or High, Umbra), nature (the Middle Umbra), and death (the Low, or Dark, Umbra). Likened to the Metaphysic Trinity (High = Dynamism, Middle = Stasis, Low = Entropy), though the Three Worlds are composed of all three principles. (See ***Umbra***, ***Underworld***.)

totem: Spirit entity that takes a special interest in a person or group, often conferring favors upon the chosen party. Usually, but not always, linked to an animal or natural force. (See ***shaman***.)

Traditions, the: One or more members of the *Council of Nine Mystick Traditions*. Currently, these Traditions are the **Akashic Brotherhood** (a.k.a. the Akashayana), **Celestial Chorus** (Singers or Choristers), **Cult of Ecstasy** (Sahajiya), **Dreamspeakers** (Kha'vadi), **Euthanatos** (Chakravanti), **Order of Hermes** (Hermetics), **Sons/ Society of Ether** (Etherites), **Verbena** (Verbenae), and **Virtual Adepts** (VAs).

Transhumanist, transhumanism: Person or philosophy dedicated to moving beyond human physical, and social limitations, usually through technology.

Umbra, Umbrae: One or more of the *Three Worlds*; from the Latin, "Shadow."

Umbrood: Any non-human inhabitant or native of the Umbra. The term is considered insulting by *shamans* and *spirits*, but it's often employed by Hermetics and technomancers.

unAwakened, unEnlightened: When using capitalized A or E, the phrase refers to people who have not yet fully Awakened. Also **un-Awakened/ un-Enlightened**.

Uncle Al: Aleister Crowley, (in)famous occultist, sarcastically referred to by many mages as "Good ol' Uncle Al."

Underworld, the: Capitalized, the Low Umbral region of death and Entropy.

Vidare: The outlook through which a person views the *Penumbra*; also affects a traveler's destination within the Otherworlds.

Void, the: Capitalized, the deepest reaches of space; the principle of ultimate Oblivion; the utter absence of possibility; primal chaos; and the heart of the Underworld – all of which, in essence, may be the same thing. Sometimes called **the Absolute**, especially by Nephandi.

vulgar magick: Drastic, obvious alterations of reality; the opposite of *coincidental magick*.

whiteout: Paradox backlash in the *Digital Web*. **The Great Whiteout** refers to a massive crash on Nov. 10, 1997, that significantly changed netspace. (See entries below for ***Ascension Warrior***, ***Doissetep***, ***Porthos***.)

wild talent: Reflexive, unconscious, unpredictable, typically chaotic expression of unschooled mystic talent; one of the primary reasons people fear *orphans* and *Marauders*. (See ***Will***.)

Will: Sometimes capitalized, will or Will refers to the force of determination and comprehension that allows a mage to alter reality through conscious choice, as opposed to *wild talent*.

willworker, will-worker: A person who works her will upon Creation... that is, a mage.

witch: Primal mystic who employs a combination of instinct and Old Ways of commoner witchcraft as opposed to *High Ritual Magick*. Among Sleepers, also a common term for disreputable (not always female) practitioners of the Arts.

Wyck, the: Legendary name for the first primordial mages, descended from the *Pure Ones*; often translated as "the Wise (Ones)."

Tradition Terminology

For Council titles, see **Chapter Five** (p. 141). Entries featuring the designation *(metaplot)* describe optional characters or events in the published history of **Mage** that a Storyteller can include or ignore.

Agent Smith: Generic Technocrat, especially a *Black Suit* or *MiB*.

Arcanopath: Someone who pursues magick and/ or knowledge without concerns about ethics, morality, or consequences. (See ***Faust***.)

Ascension Warrior, the: *(metaplot)* Mysterious figure who claimed to have been a reincarnated member of the *First Cabal* – its *Great Betrayer*. Having survived *Gilgul*, the Warrior declared vendettas against both the Traditions and Technocracy, leading to assaults on several Horizon Realms and Constructs as well

as Horizon itself. Though eventually declared an imposter, this Ascension Warrior caused catastrophic setbacks for the Traditions as a whole. (See ***Doissetep***, ***Fragile Path***, ***Horizon***, ***Porthos***.)

Avatar Storm: (*metaplot*) Metaphysical storm that made/ makes travel beyond the Gauntlet difficult and dangerous.

***bani*:** Council honorific meaning "of the House of..." Example: Spider Chase, *bani* Verbena.

Black Hats & Mirrorshades: Derogatory term for Technocrats and the Technocracy.

bongo: Short for "bongo-beater" – that is, a hippie, shaman, or *neotribalist*, particularly of the *Ecstatic* or Dreamspeaker Traditions; derogatory.

Boom Stick: Wand, staff, or device used to cast spectacularly vulgar spells.

certámen: Formalized wizards' duel, used for sport or to resolve disputes.

Colony, the: (*metaplot*) Secret stronghold of the *New Horizon Council*.

Cray: Old-form name for a Node.

cyberdork: Old-school computer mage

Dante that: To "Dante that" is to do something in as cool as way as possible.

Disneyrians: Sarcastic name for a person (Awakened or otherwise) obsessed with pop culture fantasy and magick; also known as a **Princess** (not exclusive to female mages) or **Prince Charming** (likewise).

Doissetep: (*metaplot*) Legendary Hermetic stronghold: the oldest and most powerful of its kind, second only to Horizon in size and scale. Self-destructed when the Ascension Warrior brought internal tensions to detonation point, Doissetep has been associated with the Tower card in Tarot and is regarded as a symbol of majestic *hubris*.

doxed: Fouled by Paradox; also, **fuckdoxed**, especially when referring to persistent Resonance or Paradox effects.

Dram: A measure of Tass.

Ecstatic: Capitalized, a member of the Cult of Ecstasy.

Elite: Capitalized, a Tradition mage who's been Awakened since the 1990s and survived the *Week of Nightmares* and its aftereffects; also a term for respected Virtual Adepts.

Faust: A proud and/ or careless wizard, especially one who deals with bad bargains and/ or Infernal powers; also a derogatory term for a Hermetic mage.

First Cabal, the: A hand-picked group of nine representatives for the first official Traditions Council; betrayed from within and half-slaughtered, its survivors scattered afterward. Considered a bad omen for the budding Council, but also considered an inspiration by later mages.

Fragile Path, the: A metaphor for a mage's journey to Ascension and for the ideal behind the Traditions as a whole; from the book of that name by the late Archmaster Porthos Fitz-Empress. (See ***Great Betrayer***, ***First Cabal***, ***Porthos***, ***WWPD?***)

Gandalfian: A Hermetic mage; typically an insult directed at self-important Hermetics (that is, most of them); also, **Dumbledore**.

Gilgul: Destruction of a mage's Avatar, often as a punishment; from the Hebrew, "metamorphosis."

Grand Convocation, the: Gathering of mages from around the world between 1457 and 1466; foundation of the Council of Nine.

Great Betrayer, the: (*metaplot*) Heylel Teomim Thoabath ("The Abomination"), *Solificati* representative with the *First Cabal*; betrayed the Cabal, supposedly to reveal the Council's innate vulnerability to corruption. *The Ascension Warrior* claimed to be Heylel reincarnated; truth of that claim remains unknown.

Home Turf: A Horizon Realm sympathetic to Tradition mages and their practices.

Horizon: (*metaplot*) The original center of the Council; a massive Otherworldly stronghold. Symbolizing the Traditions' unity, it was attacked and destroyed twice in the late 1990s and is now believed to be lost.

Juice: Slang for Quintessence.

Meatspace: Old Virtual Adept term for the physical world; considered laughably dated by many 21st century mages. Also plain old **meatspace**.

Merlin: Slang for a powerful and/ or self-important old-school wizard; more respectful than *Gandalfian* or *Dumbledore*.

MiB: Man in Black.

netizen: Awakened member of the Digital Web's regular community.

New Horizon Council, the: (*metaplot*) Attempt at rebuilding the Council of Traditions.

nuke: To blast someone with vulgar destructive magick.

Path of Thorns, the: Old-form version of the term *Fragile Path*, referring to an individual mage's path only.

Porthos: (*metaplot*) Properly known as Archmaster Porthos, this Hermetic wizard was supposedly the most powerful mage alive. Porthos was more than slightly insane, and though he wasn't quite a Marauder, that insanity pained him greatly. In spite of it, Porthos spoke up for, and inspired, younger Tradition mages. Believed killed on Nov. 10, 1997, by the destruction of *Doissetep*, which he supposedly contained through a massive act of self-sacrifice. (See ***Ascension Warrior***, ***Fragile Path***.)

Potter, Potterize: To cheapen something magickal and/ or wondrous; to employ pop cultural tools or rituals; or to view magick as gee-whiz Pollyanna. Obviously (and unfairly) derogatory.

Protocols, the: Laws of conduct that theoretically govern all Tradition mages.

Road Warrior hippies: Neotribalists. Derogatory and used by outsiders, often when referring to Ecstatics, Dreamspeakers, and Verbenae.

Rogue: When capitalized, refers to a mage who has quit her sect, renounced Tradition membership, turned on her former allies, or gone mercenary.

Rogue Council, the: (*metaplot*) Mysterious group or entity that began sending out clues and messages to apparently random mages around 2002; also known as (or affiliated with) the *Sphinx*.

Speaker: Capitalized, a member of the Dreamspeakers, especially a political activist or rebel shaman.

Sphinx, the: (*metaplot*) Elusive entity that encouraged/ encourages unity and Ascension among disillusioned Tradition mages; sent out untraceable messages marked with a disappearing sphinx, indicating riddles to be solved. (See ***Rogue Council***.)

step(ping) sideways: To mystically slide through the Gauntlet and enter the Penumbra.

Tribunal: Catch-all name for three types of gatherings of Council mages, usually to settle legal matters and/ or sit in judgment of crimes and determine punishments.

Twist: Slang for *Resonance*.

Week of Nightmares, the: (*metaplot*) First week of June, 1999; mass nightmares and visions greet the rise of a horrific, mysterious, godlike entity. After that entity rampages across India and Bangladesh, the Technocracy nukes it; this, in turn, kicks off the *Avatar Storm* as well as ending several hundred thousand lives.

witch-war: Internal scrap or rivalry between allied mystic factions (Tradition or otherwise).

WWPD?: "*What Would Porthos Do?*" Half-sarcastic question when confronting a daunting challenge or puzzling enigma; essentially translates to "You'd have to be insane to figure this out." Tends to piss off older mages, especially Hermetic ones who may have known Archmaster Porthos and revere him, despise him, or both.

Technocratic Terminology

For Technocratic ranks and titles, see **Chapter Five**, (p. 172). Note that certain phrases have different meanings for Technocrats than they do for Tradition mages, or have been repeated here for clarity.

Adamite: *Unmutual* Technocrat who feels superior to *unconventional personnel* due to appearing normal. (See ***biomod***, ***clone***, ***cyborg***, ***natural***, ***steelskin,*** etc.)

Adjustment: Syndicate term for a subtle *inspired Procedure* (that is, *coincidental magick*).

amalgam: Group of Technocratic operatives; a Technocrat *cabal*.

apparatus: As noted earlier, a Technocratic name for *focus*.

Avalon: Symbol of the Technocratic ideal; in Arthurian myth, the island where King Arthur awaits England's hour of great need.

"Be seeing you": Sarcastic reminder to remain loyal to the Technocracy... or else.

BFG: Big Fucking Gun; any hand-held distance weapon capable of unleashing incredible force.

biomod: Bio-modification, a.k.a. organic *enhancement*.

Black Suit: Preferred and gender-neutral name for a field agent of the NWO. (See ***Black Hats* & *Mirrorshades***, ***Boys in Black***, ***MiB***.)

Bottom Line, the: The Syndicate paradigm for reality; often phrased as "maximum profit, minimum risk."

Boys in Black: Reference to NWO operatives; somewhat derogatory.

burn: To *sanitize* a person, place, or thing.

CACS, "Cacks": Computational Anomalies Corrections Specialists, a cross-Convention division dedicated to neutralizing computer-based hazards among the Masses.

Cancelation: Capitalized, a death sentence.

Cipher: Capitalized, a near-mindless Iteration X worker; in general, an unEnlightened grunt servitor.

citizen: A valued but low-level and unEnlightened Technocracy employee, usually unaware of who and what she serves; the lowest rank aside from *ciphers*. (See ***extraordinary citizen***.)

clone: Artificial, lab-grown organism, typically human or animal, created from cell samples to replicate the basic biological characteristics of a non-artificial original. Sarcastically referred to as **carbons** or **carbon copies**, after an obsolete replication technology. (See ***construct***, ***Victor***.)

Colony: A Horizon Construct in extraterrestrial orbit.

Construct: Capitalized, a Technocratic stronghold (a.k.a. a *Chantry*); lower case, an artificially created or *enhanced* operative or organism. (See ***biomod***, ***clone***, ***cyborg***, etc.)

Control: The Technocratic ideal; the embodiment of the Technocratic ideal; also an enigmatic figure/ group named Control, who embodies and enforces the Technocratic ideal.

Convention of the White Tower: The foundation of the Order of Reason, beginning on Mar. 1, 1325; the **Declaration of the White Tower**, ratified on Mar. 25, 1325, officially founded what would eventually become the Technocratic Union.

Convention: One of the five divisions within the Technocratic Union.

cyborg: Mechanically enhanced organic operative, usually human but occasionally animal.

Daedalean: Old name for a Technocrat of the Order of Reason; from Daedalus, the legendary Greek artisan.

Data: When capitalized, refers to the Technocratic version of the *Correspondence Sphere*. The Data Principle (or Sphere) employs information as a bridge between people, locations, and events.

datacrawl, the: A streaming feed of important data that moves slowly across the peripheral vision of an operative's glasses, visor, or viewscreen; officially referred to as the **Visual Data & Analysis Spectrum (VDAS**, pronounced *veee-DAS*).

Deep Universe: Technocratic name for the *Deep Umbra*; outer space.

Default: Syndicate euphemism for an assassination.

Degree Absolute: Termination and erasure from the Union's ranks; also called **Degree 7** and the **seventh degree**. (See ***Cancelation***, ***default***, ***Room 101***.)

Deviant: Short for *Reality Deviant*; also ***RD***.

Dimension Anomaly: Technocratic name for the *Avatar Storm*.

Dimensional Science: Technocratic version of the *Spirit Sphere*, based upon exploring and controlling alternate dimensions and their associated energies.

Dispatch Center: A *mundane front* for a Technocratic operation; occasionally called a **safe house**.

drycleaning: Handling a problem without employing violence.

EDE: Extra-Dimensional Entity; an alien; a spirit.

Eidolon: As noted above, the Technocratic view of an *Avatar's Essence*.

Empowerment: Realization of the power of an Enlightened mind and *Inspired Science*; in mystic terms, the *Awakening*. Also, a preferred term for what Reality Deviants call Ascension.

enhancement: Artificial upgrades to an existing organic structure. (See ***biomod***, ***cyborg***.)

Enlightened Anthropic Principle, the: Technocratic theory that human beings create the conditions of a human-based reality through conscious and subconscious accord; in short, the belief that people – especially Enlightened people – create and maintain reality as we know it.

exo: *Scut-talk* for an obvious cyborg; also **ExoJock**.

extraordinary citizen: Valuable yet unEnlightened Technocratic operative; also a person who can understand and/or witness Inspired Science without having to be Enlightened or *Processed* first.

Frankensteinian: Scut-talk for a scientist (usually a Progenitor or Void Engineer) whose theories and/or practices are extreme and disturbing even by Technocracy standards; sometimes an adjective: "You were acting pretty Frankensteinian back there..." Also called a **Star-Eater**, **Mad Doctor,** or **Moreauvian**.

Friends of Courage: Clandestine but (in)famous group of idealistic Technocratic dissidents dedicated to purging corruption within the Union; named for legendary rogue Secret Agent John Courage. (See ***Project Invictus***.)

Front Lines, the: Earthly reality, so named for its *RD* infestation.

Front: Base of Technocratic operations among the *Masses*, disguised as a mundane business, home, or other location. (See ***Dispatch Center***.)

Genegineering: Advanced genetic engineering, often used to *biomod* operatives, constructs, or other organisms; a Progenitor specialty.

Genius, the: As noted above, the Technocratic view of an Avatar.

Great Deep, the: Slang for the *Deep Universe*.

HIT Mark: One of a series of cybernetic killer robots; also scut-talk for a ruthlessly unsubtle killing machine.

hypermath: Principles of esoteric mathematics, often beyond the minds of unEnlightened people. (See ***hypertech***, ***Inspired Science***, ***Primal Utility***, ***reality physics***.)

hypernarrative: Archetypal figures, tropes, or other elements that reoccur in human lore and media; deep-rooted pieces of humanity's subconscious that can be used to convince or seduce a person or society. Also refers to a sense of interacting with the hypernarrative, allowing a person to live the story. (See ***Mythic Threads***.)

ice-pack: A cold killer, usually from the NWO.

influence: Manipulation of one or more of the nine essential principles of reality, a.k.a. the *Spheres*; also a term for social clout (for instance, influence within the FBI).

Inner Circle: The highest level of Technocratic command and control, from which all other elements of the Technocratic Union descend. (See ***Ivory Tower***.)

Inspired Science: Theories and practices of advanced reality Procedures – a.k.a. technomagick. (See ***Enlightened Science***.)

Iterator: Short for a member of Iteration X.

Ivory Tower, the: The predecessor of the NWO; also, the apparent citadel of the Inner Circle... and thus, of established Technocratic leadership.

Kamrad: Capitalized, the *Socially Conditioned* citizens of Iteration X; lower case, a common name for low-ranking citizens of all Conventions.

lab rat: Scut-talk for a Technocrat who spends most or all of his life in a lab or *Horizon Construct*, far from the realities of the *Front Lines*.

LERMU: Living Entity Reality Modulator Unit; Void Engineer operative *genegineered* to perform better in the Deep Universe. Considered the origin of Sleeper myths about gray aliens.

Magic Man: Sardonic name for a successful Syndicate operative.

market correction: Syndicate term for Paradox effects, based upon the view of reality as an open market of ideas.

Masspeak: Putting things into terms the Masses would understand – that is, using buzzwords and mundane terms, not Technocratic jargon.

Mediation: A Technocratic term for *Seeking*, wherein the Technocrat works through mental puzzles in order to unlock deeper understanding from within her subconscious mind. (That, at least, is the *official* view of what's going on...)

Methodology: A division within a Technocratic Convention.

mutual: Cooperative and reciprocal; acting in ways that respect one's fellow Technocrats and the Technocracy in general. (See ***unmutual***.)

natural: An un-*enhanced* human (as opposed to a *construct*), born and raised in the mundane world before joining the Technocracy. (See ***Adamite***.)

Newlife: A Technocrat's existence after she becomes an initiated member of the Technocratic Union, typically marked by a new identity and the end of her previous unEnlightened existence.

Oldlife: The identity and lifestyle pursued by a Technocrat before she entered the ranks of the Technocratic Union; typically discarded upon full membership within those ranks.

Op: Short for *operative*.

Operative: Capitalized, an Enlightened agent of the NWO who specializes in espionage; uncapitalized, any Enlightened member of the Union's middle ranks.

Panopticon, the: (*metaplot*) A cross-Convention elite force of operatives assigned to track down and eradicate the *Sphinx* and its allies, often using extreme force.

PLE: Post-Life Entity; a ghost.

Pogrom, the: As noted above, the violent suppression and removal of *Reality Deviant* factions. (In certain metaplot options, the Pogrom has been suspended or has ended; in others, it's still in full force.)

polishing: Subconscious Mind-based Procedures, often used to *Process* someone without his conscious realization.

***Precepts of Damian*, the:** Essential code of ethics and operations for the Union as a whole.

Primal Utility: The psychological *hypermath* juncture between human desire and reality physics; in short, the Syndicate's version of the *Prime Sphere*.

Primal Force: The core energy within all things; in Reality Deviant terms, *Quintessence*.

Primium: Secret alloy created for hypertech *Devices*; also used to undo the effects of Reality Deviant metaphysical variations. (In game terms, a metal that grants innate *countermagick*.)

Process: A common application of *Inspired Science* (that is, a technomagickal spell); also, the act of using *Processing* on someone.

Processing, Processed: *Social Conditioning* employed to affirm and ensure loyalty to the Technocratic Union; also, to have been so Conditioned.

Project Invictus: Secret group of Technocratic idealists purging Nephandic infection and hubris from within the Union. (See ***Friends of Courage***.)

prole: Dismissive scut-talk referring to a low-ranking citizen.

reality crime: Violating the laws of established *Consensus* with metaphysical/ paranormal phenomena; in plain English, using magick or other supernatural powers. (See ***Deviance***, ***Reality Deviant***.)

reality physics: Esoteric laws of cause and effect; the deep principles underlying elementary physics; scientifically applied metaphysics; in other words, technomagick. (See ***Enlightened Science***, ***Inspired Science***, ***hypermath***, ***hypertech***.)

Reprogram: To use extreme Social Conditioning in order to purge *unmutual* and disloyal behavior; in short, Technocratic brainwashing.

Room 101: a.k.a. the **White Room**, **Black Room**, or **Red Room**; general name for a heavily secured chamber used for Social Conditioning, intimidation, interrogation, and punishment; your worst nightmare.

Sanitize: To cleanse paranormal Resonance from a Node or RD tendencies from a person (again, see ***Social Conditioning***); also, to purge all data, clues, and living things from a raided location. (See ***sweep 'n' sack***.)

Scut-talk: Technocratic slang and/ or insults; often considered mildly (and sometimes seriously) *unmutual*.

Six Degrees of Separation: Scale of trust and loyalty within the Technocracy; Degree 1 reflects maximum trust, whereas Degree 6 reflects impending dismissal. (See ***Degree Absolute***.)

sleepteacher: Device used to download information into the mind of a sleeping agent.

Social Conditioning: Method of Mind-based *influence*, employed to ensure loyalty and understanding; also, a system of mental triggers and suggestions used to purge disruptive individuality, assure conformity, and initiate a newcomer into the Technocratic paradigm; also, a form of punishment used to modify the behavior of a Reality Deviant or unmutual Technocrat, dedicating him to the Technocratic cause. (See ***Processing***, ***Reprogramming***.)

steelhead: Insulting name for an obvious *cyborg*; also, a stubborn or fanatical Technocrat.

steelskin: An obvious *cyborg*, derogatory.

Subtle Influence, Subtle Procedure: Inspired Science or hypertech employed so as not to seem too advanced for the Masses. (In game terms, coincidental technomagick.)

superstitionist: Obvious insult for mystic mages or their devotees.

Supervisor: Capitalized, an upper-ranking Technocrat, specifically one assigned to direct and monitor teams of subordinates.

sweep 'n' sack: Extreme raid in which operatives smash into a place, kill everyone, confiscate all property and data, and either replace it with false materials, data, and clones, or else *sanitize* the entire location.

Symposium: Assembly of high-ranking Technocrats, used to govern and direct operations within a given region or facility.

Threat Null: (*metaplot*) Perhaps the greatest threat the world has ever known... and only certain Void Engineers even know it exists. (See the ***Technocratic Union*** section of **Chapter Five** for details.)

UID: Universal Identification Designation, typically consisting either of two letters and a series of numbers (e.g. KD61643), a binary code (1001010110), or possibly a fragment of genetic code. Often stamped or engraved on badges, skin, and personal or assigned property; in short, a Technocrat's official name.

unconventional personnel: Enhanced, biomodded, or artificially created operatives. (See ***clone***, ***construct***, ***cyborg***, ***LERMU***, etc.)

Union, the: Short for the Technocratic Union.

unmutual: Not reciprocating the Union's generosity; disloyal; ungrateful; destabilizing morale or optimum efficiency; a person or construct presenting a threat within the Union.

uplift: The process by which a superior party raises another group above its previous physical or mental limitations, bringing on a new, progressive state of evolution.

Victor: *Genegineered* construct, meant to upgrade the human condition; noted for extreme good looks, physical capability, and unfortunate quirks of personality and mental stability. (See ***clone***, ***unconventional personnel***.)

Void: Capitalized, a historical term for the Deep Universe, undiscovered frontiers and uncharted regions; also, scut-talk for one or more Void Engineers, suggesting that such operatives are devoid of personality or avoiding other Technocrats and their concerns.

Void Adaptation: Technocratic name for ***Disembodiment***.

BOOK ONE: AWAKEN

Change uncontrolled is madness.

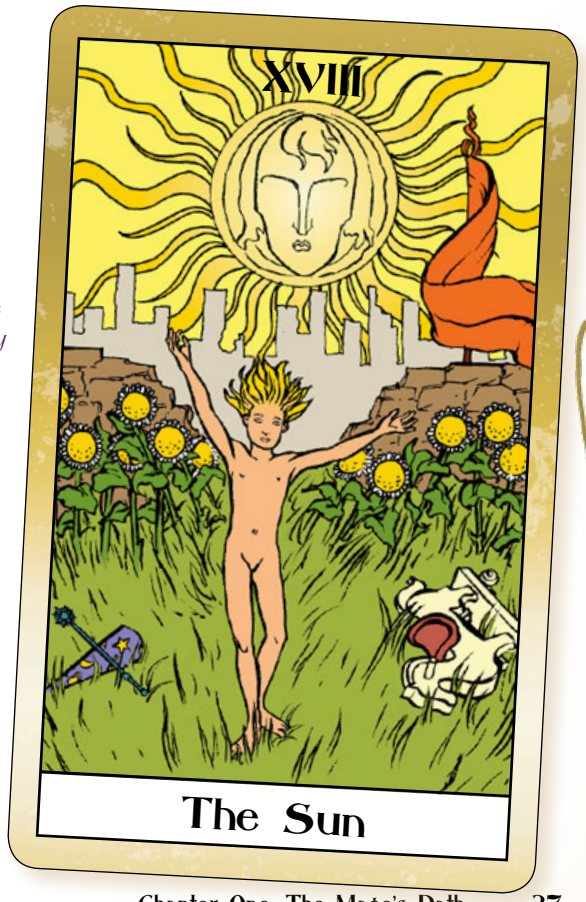
Porthos Fitz-Empress,
The Fragile Path

2013

Chapter One: The Mage's Path

For Nature, united with Man, has brought forth a wonder of wonders.
– The Corpus Hermeticum, Book I

The Sun



Associations: *Clarity; enlightenment; success; joy; energy; liberation; a sense you can achieve anything...*

"How do I look, Mom?"

She looks wonderful. Gods, how did she grow up so fast?

My daughter stands on tiptoe, whirls around to show me the burgundy dress she's wearing underneath her graduation gown. Beside her, a tall crystal vase overflows with flowers, their colors a burst of vibrant reds, blues, and yellows rising on thin green stalks. Congratulations, Loreena! declare the cards beside them, scattered like the petals from those flowers soon will be. I look away from that table, from those ghost flowers, not wanting to see the future. That's a hard-won habit for me. For eighteen years, it's had to be that way. Too much prophecy or hindsight can destroy the miracle of Now.

Loreena's beautiful. I could say that even if I wasn't Mom. For just a moment, I let that moment hang: the sunlight on her hair, caught in an endless second, flying before it falls again. The grin that slips so naturally across her face. The gleam of mischief in gray-blue eyes. The wonder of her – strong and smart. She came from me, but she's every inch her own woman too.

For a flash, I'm her age again, my own path stretching out before me, ripe with promises and threats. All too fast, I learned to fear that life, let it bow me down before I broke free again. I recall my own mother's face, cut tight with melancholy rage. Is this what she saw in me back then – the woman she once was, ready for life's adventures? Did she feel what I feel now, or were her wounds too deep for anything but envy even then? Across that moment, the Me I was and the Me I am now commune.

Blurs of impressions flow – skinned knees, long nights, pains that ripped so deep I thought they'd never let go. Shouts, slaps, kisses, dreams.

Tears – all too many tears. And sunshine. I choose to remember that. It's the sun that makes everything worthwhile.

And then I let the moment go. Loreena's hair falls back with gravity. Her lips close into the half-smile she so often wears. That mischief in her eyes, though – that stays. She has plenty to look forward to.

And so do I.

"You're gorgeous," I tell my girl. The girl I raised and the girl I am inside. "Absolutely beautiful."

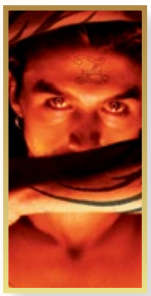
She narrows her eyes, half-teasing. "You're just saying that."

"No." I shake my head. "It's true. You've done good. I'm proud of you."

It's true. I am. She knows it, and again she smiles.

It's gonna be a good day.

Of Gods and Men



The biggest problem with men and gods is that too many men consider themselves gods and too many gods share the vanities of men. This is especially true of the Awakened – men and women blessed with godlike power and cursed with human frailties. If you would join these people, you should be aware of what that means. The power of such a Path is certain, but its ability to destroy you and everything you hold dear is equally assured.

Archmaster Porthos Fitz-Empress of the esteemed Order of Hermes realized this when he coined the term "the Fragile Path" to refer to the treacherous road all Awakened people walk. The howling madness of the Marauders, the gentler dementia of Tradition mages, the implacable certainty of the Technocracy and its infernal shadow among the Nephandi, the wandering quests of Orphans and the Disparate, the doubts each mage finds within her or his heart – these are the shadows of Ascension. When power, pride, and the paradox of lofty goals within all-too-human hands all run wild within your heart, the balance between them can seem fragile indeed.

You want to be a mage? A sacred priest or priestess of cosmic mysteries? Then pay attention to what I say. I have spent many years on that Fragile Path, and I know it like few other souls on earth.

In the Greater Arcana of the infamous Tarot, there's a journey of enlightenment and perils spread out across the faces of those cards. Some folks call it a reflection of the human condition; I regard it a mage's journey. Perhaps the Tarot itself was shaped by Awakened hands as a guide for the rest of us; I like to think, personally, that the poseurs Rider and Waite simply provided a vehicle for the one *truly* Awakened person in their company – unjustly forgotten Pamela Coleman Smith, who actually drew and painted those familiar images – to get her point across. The Tarot is far older than that, of course, dating back to the age of an earlier Sorcerers Crusade; it was Rider, Waite, and Smith, though, who popularized its mysteries, leaving us – for better and worse – a vision of what we can become.

It's a vision of devils and fools, judgment and transcendence. Just like the lives of we Awakened Ones. We act out our little games against a backdrop of tribulation. The world so often feels like it's out of control that when we *do* establish some *illusion* of control, we tend to overdo it. We rage so hard against our friends over what the world *should be* that we often lose sight of what it could *become* if we put aside our wars. And that's where we, the Awakened Ones, find ourselves all too often: at war with one another over our visions of reality.

You'll hear a lot of words like "war," "crusade," and such along this Path. That's part of the paradox I'd mentioned earlier. We claim to strive toward higher ends, and yet we do so through the blood of anyone in our way. You'll also hear that one side or another is the only *true* Path, the only *real* Way, the only reliable guide along that Fragile Path.

And I tell you this:

They're *ALL* full of shit.

All of us are right *AND* wrong.

The universal Truth is that there *is* no universal truth. Reality is what we make of it.

Gnosticism

More of a belief system than a specific practice, *Gnosticism* refers to an overall view that the Creation we perceive as reality is actually the construct of some corrupt or malevolent force. To escape the prison of this fallen reality, a Gnostic seeks wisdom and knowledge (*gnosis*) that will lead to eventual transcendence.

This concept of an inferior Creation ruled over by malignant "alien forces" or a "lord of this world" can be found everywhere from *The Matrix* or David Icke's "reptilian" conspiracy theories to many forms of Christianity or the more dour strains of pre-Christian Pagan belief. Certain approaches to Buddhism or Hinduism could be considered Gnostic even though that word rarely gets used in reference to those faiths. Transhumanism is certainly Gnostic in its ideals of post-human existence through technology. Even certain atheist creeds have Gnostic undertones; Ayn Rand's fixation with parasitic masses and Nietzsche's obsession with the Overman cast Gnostic shadows on essentially godless philosophies.

On several levels, **Mage** embodies an essentially Gnostic cosmology, one in which "Sleepers" Awaken, transcend their humanity through knowledge, and potentially Ascend to a higher state. Still, many mages are not Gnostics, either because they do not see their world as innately corrupt; they refuse to believe in higher or lower powers; or they feel that everything is miraculous if and when you open your eyes enough to recognize that fact. Although **Mage** features certain Gnostic elements, it's more *existential* – in the sense that one must find meaning in existence among a meaningless and potentially hostile cosmos – than purely Gnostic in its foundations.

Yet despite the presence of both philosophies, **Mage** is more hopeful at its core than either one. For in **Mage**, despite that hostile cosmos, those malignant forces, and the horrible consequences of failure, there's always the potential to rise above it all and provide hope in a World of Darkness.

For more details about Gnostic paradigms and their postmodern bastard children, see ***Techgnosis and Transhumanism*** in **Chapter Four (p. 105)** and ***Common Mage Paradigms*** in **Chapter Ten (pp.568-572)**.

Some mages are better people than others. And some factions care more about morals and the world at large than their rivals do. *All* of them, however, suffer from the fault of pride. They *all* tell lies to make themselves look good. And that's understandable. After all, when you really *can* make reality your bitch, it's hard to look beyond your own truth to see a greater one.

Our world has lots of high-flown stereotypes about what mages are and what we do. Some are even accurate. Beyond such poetical pretentions, though, we're human beings with the power of gods. And so our passions, our vices, our excesses, and our flaws are deeply *human* things. The greatest storms we call down are the ones within our hearts. We cry and laugh and rage and fight, we snuggle and caress and toss restlessly in bed. Even while riding cosmic forces, we retain humanity. Never forget that we're this world's holy Fools. A sense of play can keep you sane.

So when I tell you all the things I'm about to say, remember this: I'm lying too. It's just *my* truth. Not necessarily yours.

As the saying goes, your mileage may vary, even when we're sharing the same trip.

Mystics, Technomancers, and Technocrats – *Oh, My!*

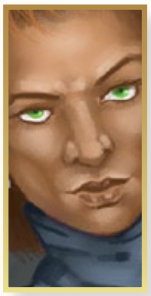
You'll find two major divisions throughout **Mage**: *mystics*, who openly embrace what they're doing as magick or faith, and *technomancers*, who define what they're doing in terms of arcane or advanced science. In game terms, they're all doing the same thing; in story terms, though, their beliefs about what they're doing are entirely different and often antagonistic.

The word *mystic* comes from the Greek root *mustēs*, "to initiate;" *technomancer* comes from a compound meaning roughly "to see through knowledge of the Art." Those roots reveal the primary differences between mystics and technomancers: mystics consider themselves to be members of elite, initiated groups, whereas technomancers see themselves as people using skills and devices to achieve great things.

There's plenty of crossover between those groups. A Wiccan technomancer can still view himself as a mystic using technology, and a Catholic scientist regards herself as an elite servant of God using human technology to work miracles.

The capital-T *Technocrats* belong to an elite group too: the Technocratic Order, which certainly has its own levels of initiation. Not all *technomancers*, though, are *Technocrats*. That distinction *sounds* small, but to folks like the Virtual Adepts, it's pretty damned important.

Sleepers, Awake



The first card of the Tarot is the Fool – that pretty boy or girl about to walk off a cliff. And yes, the Fool's androgynous, like many characters in Coleman's deck. I like to think she did that on purpose, so that folks who knew how to look past their preconceptions could see themselves, male or female, on that journey. Our Fool's got belongings slung over his or her back, with a little dog yapping right at the edge of the drop. Meanwhile, the Fool's staring off into the sky, perched on the edge between disaster and flight.

That's us.

We silly humans come into this world with open eyes. And then we take our first breaths and begin to close those eyes and scream. Most folks never open their eyes again after that... or when they do, they see only what they want to see. What they're *told* to see. Mama or Papa hold us close, or doctors smack our butts to hear us howl, and that's as far as most people get. In Awakened circles, we call those people *Sleepers*. They're alive, and they dream, but their eyes are closed to the world around them.

And then there are the folks who wander around in a daze. They can sense shapes and sounds and have some degree of control over their movements, but they're still going through the motions like they're still asleep. Some of us call such people *Sleepwalkers*, but they have other names too: hedge wizards, geniuses, mad poets, dreamers, and saints. Certain Sleepwalkers wake up halfway, stuck in nightmares where they imagine themselves to be both potent and powerless. We call them the *Night-Folk*: vampires, changelings, the various Changing Breeds that rampage through a realm between human, animal, and god. There are hunters and hunted and lost souls of every description. None of them, though, know the secrets we are heir to. They're mighty in their way, and deadly as hell. But they are *not* us, and they can never be *like* us.

Because there are people who take that first breath and then *wake up*. We might feel sleepy for a while, but there always comes a point when just dreaming isn't enough for us.

That's the *Awakening*.

The thing that makes us what we are.

This Awakening comes upon us like a lightning bolt, a so-called *Epiphany* in which the sleeping world bursts into clear, sharp focus. That which we'd believed before is revealed to be untrue. The person we had seen in the mirror until then stands before us, both alien and familiar. In that flash of insight, we realize just how powerful we truly are inside.

Some folks refer to the Epiphany as a fourfold embrace – a level of comprehension that's perceptual, physical, intellectual, and spiritual all at once. An Awakened person *sees* magick, *feels* magick, *grasps* magick, and ultimately *becomes* magick. Whether or not that person ever calls what he or she does "magick" is beside the point. Magick is not what we *use*. Once we have Awakened, it's what we *are*.

And I'll tell you this, unpopular as the truth might be: we're *all* mages, we Awakened Ones. Tradition wizards and Technocrats, Mad Ones and Fallen Ones, and all the "ones" in between who refuse to choose a side in our demented little War. We're *ALL* fucking mages. Many refuse that title, or deny it to others, but that's what we are: priest-kings holding the keys to reality.

The word *mage* comes from the Persian *magus*, the Greek *mágos*, and the Latin *magus*. Supposedly, these were pre-Zoroastrian priests charged with shepherding lesser people along the perilous road through a divine war. The word and its duties came to be associated with people of great power and treacherous potential — with mortals sharing the gifts of gods. And so, although the word itself had specific connotations once, it's a fair representation of what we all do. And let no one tell you otherwise: we *all* do it. Even the Nephandi, in their way, are shepherds along a sacred road; they might lead their flocks to the edge of a cliff, but they leave that final leap for the sheep. We mages, though... we don't fall when we take that leap. Not even the so-called Fallen Ones. No, when we mages open our eyes and take that step, we fly.

Future Fates: The Ascension War

A centuries-old struggle for the future of reality in the human realm, the Ascension War has divided mages into several conflicting factions, each one striving to shape reality to fit its own ideals.

By the late 1990s, it seems as if that War is over. The Traditions take a beating from both internal divisions and outside assaults. The Gauntlet between worlds has thickened, and most archmages are dead. The pervasive nature of technology appears to have bred a universal belief that magic and wonder are impossible, and so certain authorities declare the Ascension War won.

Those authorities understand neither the Ascension War nor the human spirit.

While the Technocracy gloats and the Traditions despair, religious fundamentalism and magical belief surge. Technology, rather than destroying magick, winds up facilitating it instead. Meanwhile, apocalyptic fervor throughout the supposedly sleeping world threatens to destroy that world in the name of God. Popular entertainment and religious fundamentalism wind up bringing magick into vogue behind the Technocracy's back. And all the while, a faction that almost everyone had considered kaput performs a devastating endgame...

At the turn of the new millennium, the Ascension War rages on – less obvious than before, but no less intense. That apparent ending has, in fact, made the conflict even *more* intense. These days, the mages aren't fighting over abstract goals. They're all fighting to survive.

For more details about these Future Fates events, see **Chapter Five**'s *Awakened History*.

The Ascension Factions

Mages who choose sides in the Ascension War fall into several distinct factions:

- **The Council of Nine Mystick Traditions:** The most obvious as mages, these nine Traditions comprise a group of allied wizards, witches, mystics, and mad scientists. Originally taking a traditional magical approach, the group formed between 1457 and 1466 in response to the Order of Reason – a faction that would eventually become...
- **The Technocratic Union:** Forged in the light of science and philosophy, the Technocracy emerged in the Middle Ages as a confederation of artisans, priests, bankers, and explorers policed by a secret band of assassins. Then called the Order of Reason, the group worked its slow but inexorable will over the mystic world. Fusions of technology and ruthlessness eventually pushed the Traditions and other groups into corners. By the late 20th century, this faction dominates everything it touches.
- **The Marauders:** At the opposite end of the sanity spectrum, these so-called marauders embody the wildest magickal impulses. Metaphysical schizophrenics, they carry their own realities with them, often impervious to the realities nearby. Unlike the first two groups, these mages are disorganized at best. Although small groups cooperate within spheres of communal madness, the Mad Ones literally live in worlds of their own, occasionally colliding with the lives of other people... often with devastating results.
- **The Nephandi:** In the shadows of the other groups, the Fallen conspire. Taking their name from the essence of shadows, these mages make a conscious choice to embody opposition, corruption, and decay. Oblivion, they feel, is the ultimate fate of everything. Nephandi draw their powers from voids that all other mages, even the Mad Ones, fear... and, especially these days, fear with *very* good reason...
- **Orphans and the Disparate Crafts:** Refusing to choose sides within the other groups, the so-called Disparates and Orphans tend their own business. Some gather into culturally related Crafts; others shape their destinies on the streets or in hidden spots where they feel safe – at least for a while – from the War between those rival factions.

Not all mages choose a side; some change sides, and others stay as far as possible from them all. The Ascension War isn't a universal fight. Even so, almost every mage alive has felt its thunder. Whether one chooses to join that War or not, it shapes – and sometimes shakes – the Awakened world.

The "M" Word with that Funny "K"

Before I say more about mages, I want to spend a moment with *magick* – that funny thing that all the fuss is about. Some folks spell it with a "c," others with a "k," and almost everyone with a different idea about what it means. Personally, I prefer the "k" spelling because it echoes Aleister Crowley's observation of magick as "the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity to the will." Many people find the word pretentious... but then, a certain degree of pretention is inevitable when you play games with reality. As far as I'm concerned, it's pretense only if you can't live up to the power of your claims. And since living up to such power is what magick is all about, that spelling seems appropriate to me.

Use your own judgment. You Will anyway.

And yes, I mean "W" with a Crowleyan pretention too. Crowley, bless his pointy little head, recognized what it is we do. We *Will* in a very specific sense, we mages. We use willpower to make things happen. Unless we have the will, there's no "way" to employ magick. That's why we, of all people, have so much willpower: we need it to do what we do. And it's why certain souls call us willworkers, with or without a capitalized W. We work our wills to make magick happen.

As for magick itself, you'll hear endless arguments about what it means. Certain mages see it as the touch of their god, and others view it as Promethean fire. It could be regarded as the keyboard of Reality, to be stroked and hacked and played like Beethoven's grand piano. You might view it as the natural state of humanity before a fall, or as the grand destiny to which we all aspire. Once upon a time, supposedly, *all* people could do magick; I'm not certain I believe that, but some folks do. Often referred to as the Art, magick is an essential component of what many mages call *Ascension*: a personal or universal transcendence of human limits. That's a whole other subject, which I'll go into momentarily. For now, just remember this: magick's what you do when you're Awake enough to reshape our world to your desires.

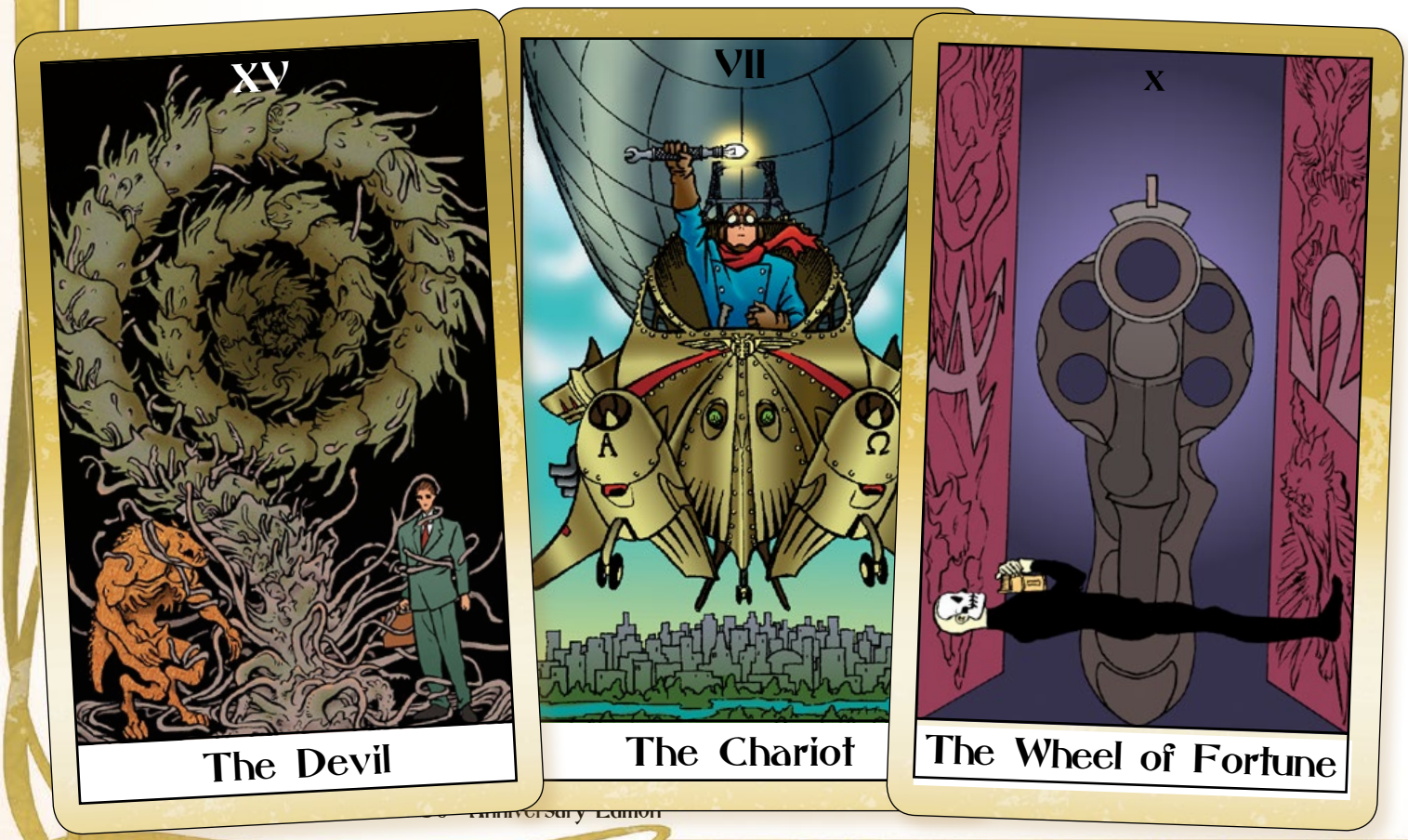
Ascension and its War

That kind of power scares people… and with good reason. It's frightening to realize what you can do if you truly set your mind to it, and it's even more terrifying to realize that other people can do it whether you want them to or not. That terror drives what we'll call *the Ascension War* – a struggle over the fate of reality as we know it.

In the Tarot's grand journey-map, this War is where we find our Devils and Chariots, our Wheels and Towers and maybe Judgment too. It's where many of us find Strength and Lust and the many trials of Cups and Wands, Pentacles and Swords. Waged in many forms since the dawn of humanity, and in its present form since the European Renaissance witnessed a "sorcerers crusade," this War (yes, another capitalized term; we have lots of those) pits the forces of magick, faith, science, and damnation against one another. The history behind it is unimportant now; let's just say that the factions that rage through the shadows of reality took their marching orders from an ancient grudge but are truly, at their core, motivated by the fear of someone's else's magickal truth.

We cantankerous mystic apes agree on almost nothing. Each human being, Awakened or otherwise, has a different take on what "reality" means. We agree about certain things, of course – water's wet, things fall when dropped, and we have two arms, legs, and eyes unless we're somehow changed by fate. Thing is, when you're one of us, you realize that those certain things are up for grabs; we might breathe under water, fly through the air, or change the shapes we were born into. The *power* to do such things is magick. The pride of such power leads us toward Ascension… and, paradoxically, *away* from it as well.

Ascension is a grand ideal. To some mages, it's an individual's ability to transcend this mortal carcass and go on to Heaven or Nirvana or whatever else waits just out of sight for us. The archetypal image of Ascension is on the World card – the last stop in the Tarot journey – where a naked soul



dances between the elements, half-wrapped in a mantle of glorious abandon. It's both surrender *and* control, childlike joy with mature understanding. That's one of many paradoxes in our Path: the more you try to explain or capture it, the less likely you are to actually reach that goal.

Because of that particular paradox, many mages reach for a lesser goal instead: they want to make the *world* Ascend. And they'll tell you that's the ultimate benevolence. And they'll be lying then, because it's *not*. Although you might disagree with this opinion, as many mages do, in my mind such universal Ascension is the ultimate form of slavery. It replaces individual revelation with communal unity, getting all sleepers to awaken *the way we think they should*. It's a utopian goal, with the same flaw as all Utopias: the insistence that everyone conform to someone else's ideals. And though the Technocracy may be the most obvious offender in that regard, many other mages are guilty of it too.

So, we war.

Hubris, Our Fatal Pride

We wage our Ascension War for the fate of our world. We wage it for our own survival. We wage it out of *hubris*, the fatal pride that leads to destruction. The biggest crater in our Fragile Path, hubris insists that because we *can* do a thing, we *should* do it... because after all, it is our *right* to do it. Reality is in our hands, so it's our duty to make our world a better place with it – better, of course, by the standards we decide.

And that's where the cracks begin.

It often starts with people healing the sick and bringing fire and doing things that cry out desperately to be done. And that's good. But when you become convinced that only *you* know what's good or not, that fire ignites a holocaust. Robots march, and witches curse, and lightning storms flash down Main Street.

And we, the Awakened Ones, have been doing that kind of shit for centuries.

In the name of Ascension, the grand ideal, we make slaves and corpses of those in our way. The Technocracy gets the blame, but any so-called Ascension Warrior is guilty.

We *fear*, often rightly, and so we *fight*. And kill. And die. Every so often, we Ascend. All too often, though, we burn.

Magick is our gift, responsibility, and curse. We can use it to light lamps or set fire to the world. And we do both those things, and more besides.

And this is why, in the grand scheme of things, we're all such Fools, dancing at the edge of transcendence and oblivion.

The Avatar

See that dog by the Fool's feet? That's the guardian, dancing both warnings and enticements. If the Fool isn't listening, he or she will tumble off the cliff. But if that Fool *is* listening, those barks and dances encourage vigilance. That dog lets the Fool know where to place the next steps.

And that's the *Avatar* – that fragment of divinity that guides us through Awakening.

"Avatar" is another loan-word that suits who and what we are. In Hindu cosmology, an avatar is an embodied aspect of a god. And in a way, that's exactly what a mage's Avatar is: an embodiment of the god within.

Now, different mages have different takes on that sort of thing. Celestial Choristers and other monotheistic mages will tell you that *everything* is a fragment or creation of the One True God, with Avatars being closer to that God than mortal flesh. Pagan mystics often claim that we're all little fragments of Divinity, just waiting to realize that fact. Atheistic mages look at the Avatar as a reflection of one's Inner Genius, and others regard it as a bodhisattva, a past life, a guardian angel, or some other manifestation of deeper understanding. Like I said, we mages are a diverse lot. We wield similar powers but describe them in very different ways.

An Avatar can look like whatever you'd expect to see. Are you searching for a handsome stranger? There he is. Did you dream of a lovely lady? She's right inside you, even if you're a man. If you're looking for angels, you'll find one at your shoulder; if you fear demons, the Avatar dances that role too. That guiding spirit can look like hell on wheels or heaven with a stick-shift. It can even look like *you* – maybe the You you've always dreamed you could be, or the You you're afraid to catch sight of in the mirror. I've known mages who saw their Avatars as puffs of smoke, android servants, or voices in the air. Yes, they can even look like dogs. The form isn't important. The function is.

An Avatar guides its mage through the often painful process of Awakening. Sometimes, it'll drag that mage kicking and screaming through nightmare streets. An Avatar, it's been said, can be a teacher, a parent, a brute, or a lover. It's both a master and a slave, with cruelty and kindness in its hands. What an Avatar *never* is, is *indifferent*. Whatever role it takes in your life, you're important to that spirit and that spirit's important to you. Whether or not an Avatar holds the power of Awakening or simply shows a mage the way to find it, that Avatar holds the key to mystic understanding. The stronger it is to you, the more you understand.

An Avatar first comes to a mage in the moment of Epiphany, at the point where mortal illusions disappear. Sometimes this happens gradually – weird little things that begin to make sense over time as understanding grows. Most often, at least in this era, the Awakening blasts a mage into sudden painful awareness. Maybe those little things suddenly add up to a literally *awe-full* truth. Or maybe time-tested preconceptions abruptly shatter, revealing truths that were hidden until then. Whatever happens to the mage – and regardless of the *age* at which it happens, which could range from childhood to elder status but most often comes on the edge of maturity – the Avatar shakes the mage, and that mage wakes up.

Seekings

After that Awakening, the Avatar sticks around to guide the mage. Using lures, gifts, enticements, and threats, that inner god dogs a mage's steps along the Path. During what we call *Seekings*, the Avatar challenges the mage to reach further, unravel mysteries, pass tests, withstand temptations, face her fears, or embrace her true potential. Like a teacher, the Avatar presents obstacles and problems for the mage to solve; if she succeeds, the Avatar grants more understanding of magick's gifts; if not, that mage stays stuck where she'd been until she's ready to pass the test.

Seekings usually take place in a deeply symbolic realm within the mage's imagination. Does the Avatar spirit the mage's consciousness off to a distant otherworld, or is the entire experience all "in the head" of an entranced mage? No one's really sure. Like so many things along our Path, there are no facts, just suppositions.

Mages don't usually disappear from sight during a Seeking; their friends find them asleep or meditating, yet unable to wake up until the Seeking ends. Occasionally, though, mages *do* disappear during a Seeking... and some never return. Others die from mysterious causes or come back insane. The Marauders begin this way, Awakening or Seeking in places that drive them mad even by magickal standards. Most often, though, a mage returns from a Seeking with either a deeper understanding of potential or a disappointed look and a promise to do better next time. In the Awakened world, a Seeking is the test you must pass if you want to get ahead... and until you *do*, you *won't*.

Arete

The primary measure of magickal Will and understanding is often called *Arete*. A Greek word translating roughly as a spiritual form of courageous excellence, Arete – correctly pronounced as *ahr-eh-TAY*, usually said as *AIR-eh-tay,* but *never* called *Arr-REET* by a knowledgeable mage! – reflects the mixture of knowledge, will, imagination, and integrity that true magick demands. Without Arete, a mage cannot work freely with such powers; without *increasing* it, he remains stuck. By whatever name it is known (and again, different mages call this quality by different names), Arete is the essence of a mage.

The tests that an Avatar poses to a mage within a Seeking provide that mage's keys to Arete. Before he can attain higher levels of excellence, the mage must prove himself to be worthy of them. Unlocking doors of ignorance, pride, fear, and stagnation, a true willworker faces those challenges and returns to his world... assuming he returns at all... having learned some vital new lesson about the secrets of his Arts and the secrets in his soul. If he doesn't learn them, or turns away from the test, then his Arts are limited. He has *power* but not *control*.

Who's in Charge Here?

Looking your Avatar in the face, it's easy to see why so many people wonder who's commanding whom. That spirit, after all, seems like a cross between a teacher, a drill sergeant, and your worst nightmare, especially when you're in the middle of a Seeking. To certain mages, notably the Technocratic ones, the whole "avatar" thing is self-delusion... or worse, manipulation by outside forces too horrible to contemplate. Certain Awakened folks gravitate toward the Technocracy in order to escape their Avatars, submerging those weird spectres in routines of clean, efficient *science*. The Union knows how to wrestle control away from superstitious thoughts, and their apparent success in that Ascension War shows how effective they can be. But whichever side you choose or whatever form your Avatar attains, remember this: the Avatar serves you, not the other way around.

Essence and the Metaphysic Trinity

Each Avatar, it's been said, has an *Essence*: a sort of metaphysical personality. The nature of that personality is, as with most things, open to debate. Is it a reflection of the mage's subconscious self? The draw of ancestral spirits? A fragment of celestial or demonic force embedded in the mage's soul? A wild weaving wyrm conjured up from warring entities? Or is it simply the inclinations – spiritual or even genetic – within the mage herself? Awakened folk debate such questions endlessly. What's certain, though, is that Essence guides the shape and behavior of your Avatar. Its tendencies tend to become, or mirror, your own.

The Council of Traditions recognizes four clear Essences, with a fifth one theorized but not yet accepted as official. Three of those four gravitate toward what Council mages call the *Metaphysic Trinity*, with the fourth between those extremes and the fifth supposedly encompassing them all.

Also known as *the Threefold Path*, the Trinity epitomizes:

Dynamism, the force of unbridled possibility;

Stasis, the forms and patterns such possibility attains; and...

Entropy, the inevitable pull of destruction that breaks down Stasis and cycles back to Dynamism again.

Between them, there's a quest for *Balance*, avoiding the extremes while remaining true to the cycle.

And beyond them all, there's said to be *Infinity*, the One-That-Is-All. The Ein Soph. Unity. The Absolute. Sometimes even called

Technocratic Terminology

Despite the widespread belief that Technocracy personnel are soulless mirrorshades, members of the Union have similar experiences under different names:

- **Enlightenment:** Awakening – not a mystic experience, but the flowering of a full human potential that few humans actually achieve. Also a common Technocratic term for Arete, which is considered to be a reflection of that realized potential.
- **Enlightened Procedures:** Magick.
- **The Masses:** Sleepers.
- **Genius:** A common name for the Avatar as the Technocracy understands it.
- **Eidolon:** The Avatar Essence, usually understood in the same Dynamic, Static, Questing, and Primordial fashion.
- **Mediation:** A common term for the Seeking process, typically considered a subconscious reflection of real-world training and experience.

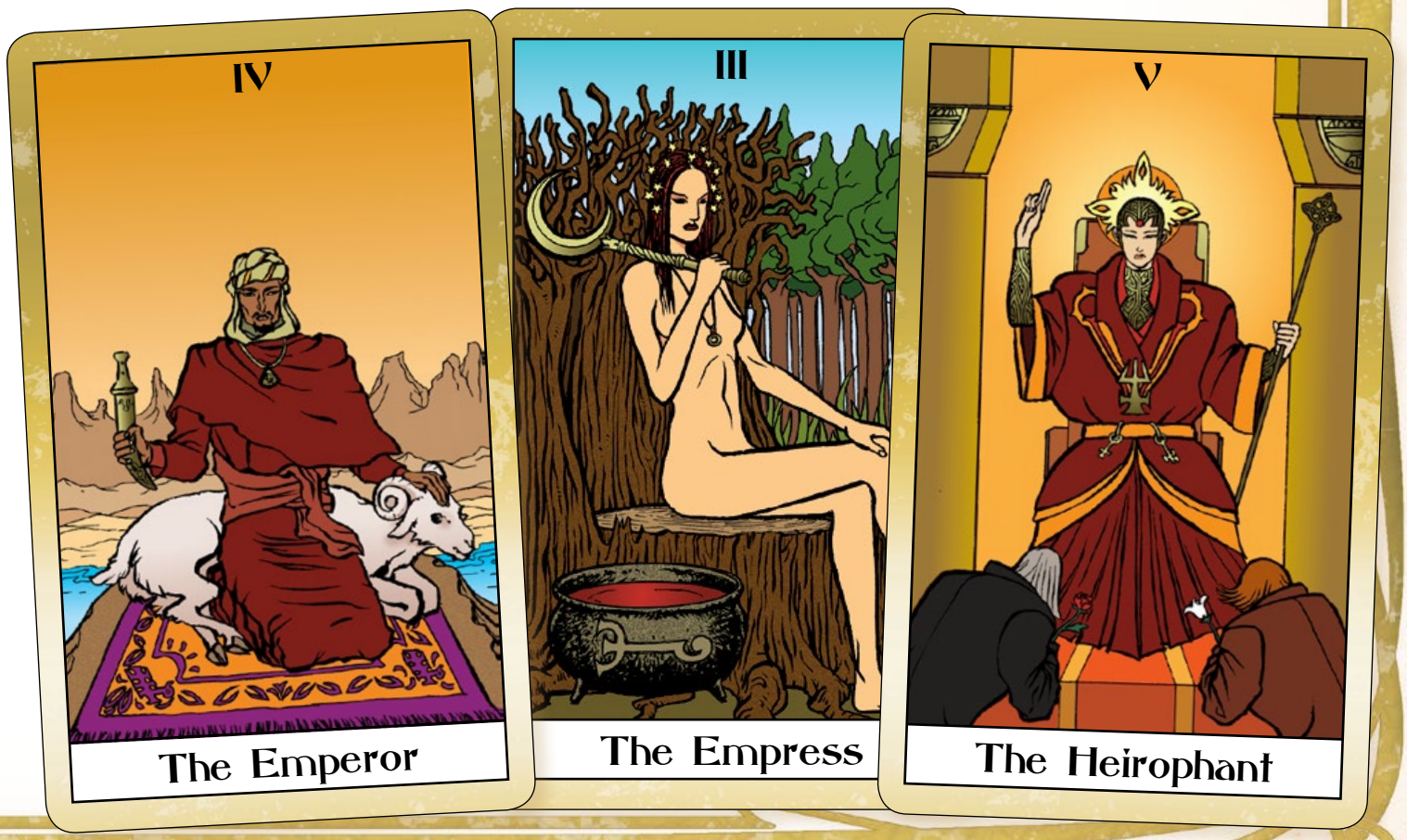
the Void, this cosmic "dark matter" supposedly exists because theory insists that it *should*. To Nephandi and some other mages, this Void is the true nature of reality, an endless nothing onto which we impose the other forms before they dissipate into metaphysical dust. Not the most *cheerful* concept, but a potent one anyway.

You could view the Ascension War in terms of this Trinity too, with Dynamism being the Marauders, Stasis reflecting the Technocracy, Entropy embodied by the Nephandi, and the Traditions and Disparates balancing them out. That's oversimplified, I think. You can find Avatars and tendencies of all those forces in any one of the groups. Still, it's one way to look at the Ascension War: as a struggle between cosmic forces, with mages the pawns who believe themselves kings.

Poetry and the Art

With regards to Avatar Essences, the Council's chosen four are: *Dynamic*, *Pattern*, *Questing*, and *Primordial*. The first reflects wild creative potential; the second, a tendency to make things firm; the third searches new horizons; and the fourth slides beneath the surface of the rest, mysterious and ultimately unknowable.

In the old days, wizards compared these Essences to fire (Dynamism), fortresses (Pattern), winds (Questing), and the sea



(Primordial). Certain mystic texts refer to them as entities – the Fire Queen, the Earth-Worker, the Lord of Winds, and the Lady of the Depths – whose courtships and conflicts are mirrored by mages in our world. Some authorities view the Trinity as Fathers or Mothers, Sons or Maidens, and Spirits or Crones. The Technocrats call all of that nonsense, but even *they* craft words around these sublime subjects. That's inevitable, really. It's easier to deal with cosmic forces when you put a face on them.

We mages are a poetic lot. Metaphor and symbolism are our meat and drink, so to speak. We don't *all* speak in high-flown imagery, of course, but for such cosmic matters, poetics seem appropriate. Language, like magick, takes sublime concepts and puts them into forms that help us communicate our thoughts. One cannot discuss magick without using metaphors. For many good reasons, magick's often called "the *Art*."

The Will to Power

There's a huge step between the realm of the Fool and the realm of the Magician and his associated cards: the High Priestess, Empress, Emperor, and Hierophant. The first step represents wonder, peril, and potential; the following steps reflect control. This is where Awakening becomes the Path. Wide-eyed acceptance becomes a Will to Power. Standing with one hand toward the sky and the second toward the earth, The Magician – oh, let's call him what he is: *The Mage* – embodies focus, commitment, and a sense of Self. Where the Fool explores, the Mage and his companions *decide*. Such confidence grants them authority, grandeur, and responsibility. And that, of course, is where things get interesting.

A common expression among mystics is *Do what you will*. People misunderstand this as a license for careless self-indulgence. It's anything *but* that. What the expression means, in its several variations, is *Manifest your Will into the world, with full awareness of what you do*. In other words, know what you're doing before you do it, do it with commitment, and be prepared to deal with the consequences. Although life holds few guarantees, the mage who follows that advice can generally live longer, and make fewer messes, than one who does not.

Awareness, Conflict, and Resolution

The Fragile Path involves three steps: awareness, conflict, and resolution. Each mage follows some variation on these steps. Some wizards live for centuries, and others blow themselves to smithereens within a week or so of Awakening. Either way, the trajectory off that Fool's cliff leads in the following directions.

Awareness

Once you've Awakened, you've become *aware*. Your world's bigger, with more possibilities. Sensations become more vivid. The Avatar becomes a presence in your life. Things no longer seem random but appear to follow a greater design. Awareness shows you your place in that design... and shows you how to work with it.

Instruction and Mentorship

Baby birds still need to be taught how to fly. So do we. Instruction is essential for magical folks. Without it, we become hazards to ourselves and everyone in sight. This, I suspect, is where Marauders come from; their wild talents go haywire in the world. Still, even the Marauders reach out often for instruction. It might follow an insane design, but it makes sense, if only in their heads.

Instruction can take many forms: an elder mage, a guiding spirit, book-research, a coven, a fellowship, or an indoctrination program. In the old days, budding mystics were sent off on apprenticeships, given to convents and cloisters, or initiated into secret societies. There, experienced mages and unAwakened mentors gave them training and expertise. These days, that still happens, especially in societies that acknowledge the existence of magick (if only in religious contexts) and follow the ancestral ways. That wizard school in the Harry Potter books? Such places exist on the fringes of this world. When a mage achieves awareness, those instructors often come looking for him.

Magickal instruction isn't always obvious. The Technocracy, in fact, refuses to call what it does "magick." Instead, a Technocratic initiate gets invited or strong-armed into a "self-improvement program" that indoctrinates her in the Technocratic way. Other groups follow cultural lines, with vision quests and ordeals and holy orders and so forth. The form isn't important. The guidance and instruction *is*.

Mentors become the Empresses, Emperors, and Hierophants of our world. Occasionally they're our Lovers too. Such elders take responsibility for the people in their care. In exchange for sharing their experience, they expect a certain amount of loyalty. Some mentors demand old-world apprenticeship oaths, and others just expect their props – and get pissed if such respect's not given. The next inevitable step on the Path, *conflict*, often begins with the mentor-student relationship. Especially in the modern world, folks don't like being told what to do. If orders go against their grain, they rebel.

Ideally, though, a mentorship teaches the new mage to use his powers well. A mentor passes on the tools, beliefs, and secrets of her trade, and though the student may eventually leave them behind, these mystic training wheels provide a focus for the mage's innate potential. Through them, talent becomes skill and awareness becomes Art.

Conflict

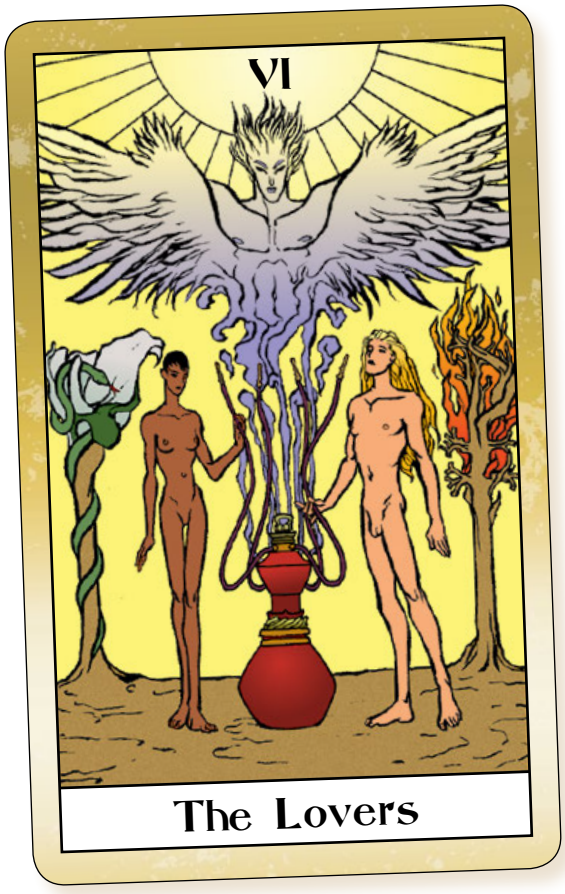
Peace never lasts. We are creatures of conflict, and so conflicts are inevitable. Many will be emotional and intellectual. A few are philosophical. Quite often, they get physical too. That bright spark of awareness eventually becomes a flame... and then, as I said earlier, we burn.

Rival Mages

Sometimes that conflict starts immediately. A traumatic Awakening blasts the mage's world wide open. This happens literally more often than you'd think; a newborn mage sets her parents on fire, blows up a school, or goes wild until someone brings her down. So-called authorities make excuses about poltergeists, abductions, or shooting sprees, but the Awakened know what's *really* going down.

If a new or potential Awakening goes down that way, mage factions send retrieval agents out to collect the new recruit – usually for training, occasionally for disposal. These teams, if they cross paths with one another, often fight as well. Weird turf wars can erupt over a single mage, especially if that person seems unusually gifted. Disappearances, shootouts, gang wars, and ritual murders are facts of life in the Awakened world. As I said earlier, the Ascension War is a very real thing. Rival factions can – and will – capture, convert, or destroy a new-Awakened mage and everyone around her if that keeps another faction from getting to her first.

Those conflicts don't end when a new mage joins a faction; typically, they become more intense. Beyond the obvious fighting between large factions – and, more dangerously, the *less-than-obvious* fighting – you've got rivalries within groups. Hermetic wizards spat with shamanic Dreamspeakers; Black Suits drag mad scientists in for questioning and correction; two covens of Verbena witches wage a witch-war over small differences of belief. Enlightened as we claim to be, we mages find lots to fight about.



The Night-Folk

The deadliest threats often come in the night. Vampires, werewolves, furious ghosts, and treacherous faeries present serious threats to our kind. Though their forms of "magic" are more limited than our own, such creatures tend to be bigger, stronger, and tougher than we are. A mage who gets in a werewolf's way comes out looking like day-old spaghetti. And one who dances with vampires can lose everything that makes him magickal.

Night-Folk can be uncannily seductive too. Their gifts are like aphrodisiacs for us. We cherish mysteries and gravitate toward power, so it's natural that we'd seek out Lovers and Devils in their ranks. And sure, such alliances are possible. Mages and Night-Folk work together all the time. Just remember to bring Strength and Temperance when dealing with their kind. A vampire's kiss, for a mage, can bring about a fate far worse than Death.

Mortal Agencies

Once upon a time, mages did what they damn well pleased. If a wizard wanted to be a king, he summoned a few demons and overthrew the local lords. If a witch got pissed, there was hell to pay. Certain factions would like to bring those days back again, but there's a catch: even if rival mages don't sweep in and take down a potential wizard-king, the mortal authorities will do it for them. In the old days, angry kings, priests, and

churches brought on what we call *the Burning Times* – an age of persecution that drove our monsters underground. Now, in an era filled with cell phone cameras, SWAT teams, and tanks, would-be gods don't stand a chance.

The so-called Sleepers are far from helpless. Mortal governments have secret agencies that deal with paranormal threats. Cops, priests, special agents, journalists, counselors, witch-hunters, and the occasional assassin get dispatched when a mage acts too free and obvious with her Arts. For this reason, among others, we are careful with what we do. Magick can be great and terrible, yes; compared, though, to forces of religion or the law, even the most powerful wizards are like roaches in a blender.

Reality Inertia, Consensus, and Humanity

The mortal world's most potent weapon against our kind, though, and perhaps the greatest challenge to *any* mage, involves the weight and inertia of Reality itself. Because magick, even the most potent kind of it, must either flow with that tide or else push back against it... often with painful results for the mage.

Imagine yourself as a swimmer at the beach. If you go with the flow, you get further – with less splashing and fatigue – than you do if you throw yourself against the waves. Think of Reality as that ocean and you'll understand what I mean by *reality inertia*. That's the pushback we get when we go against the flow.

Who makes that ocean? That debate's been going for ages. As best as we can figure, though, the mass of our Earth's reality comes from those supposed Sleepers and the combined force of their belief. In the old days, things were more fluid because you didn't have billions of people believing the same thing; the more expansive and connected humanity has become, however, the stronger the weight of mass belief has grown.

Certain mages call this weight *consensual reality*, or the *Consensus*. It's the ocean we have to swim through. Now, sometimes you have to plow through those waves and splash around to get things done. The more you splash around, though, the more tired you get. Meanwhile, folks notice that you've stirred things up and – like bathers who've gotten splashed by some rude stranger – they tend to get hacked off at whoever's done that splashing. Later on, you'll see how unfortunate their displeasure can be for you. For now, let's just say that reality inertia is not your friend unless you get the Consensus on your side. On many levels, that's what the Ascension War's all about: guiding the tide so it's easier to go with that flow.

Alienation and Sanctuaries

As mages reach further into magick's realm, it's harder to retain a sense of humanity. We're still *people*, as I said before, but distance creeps in between the Sleepers' illusions and the things we understand. This tends to strain our relationships with co-workers, lovers, family, and friends. When you can read another person's mind or control the fall of supposedly random cards, after all, a certain impatience with the rest of the world sets in.

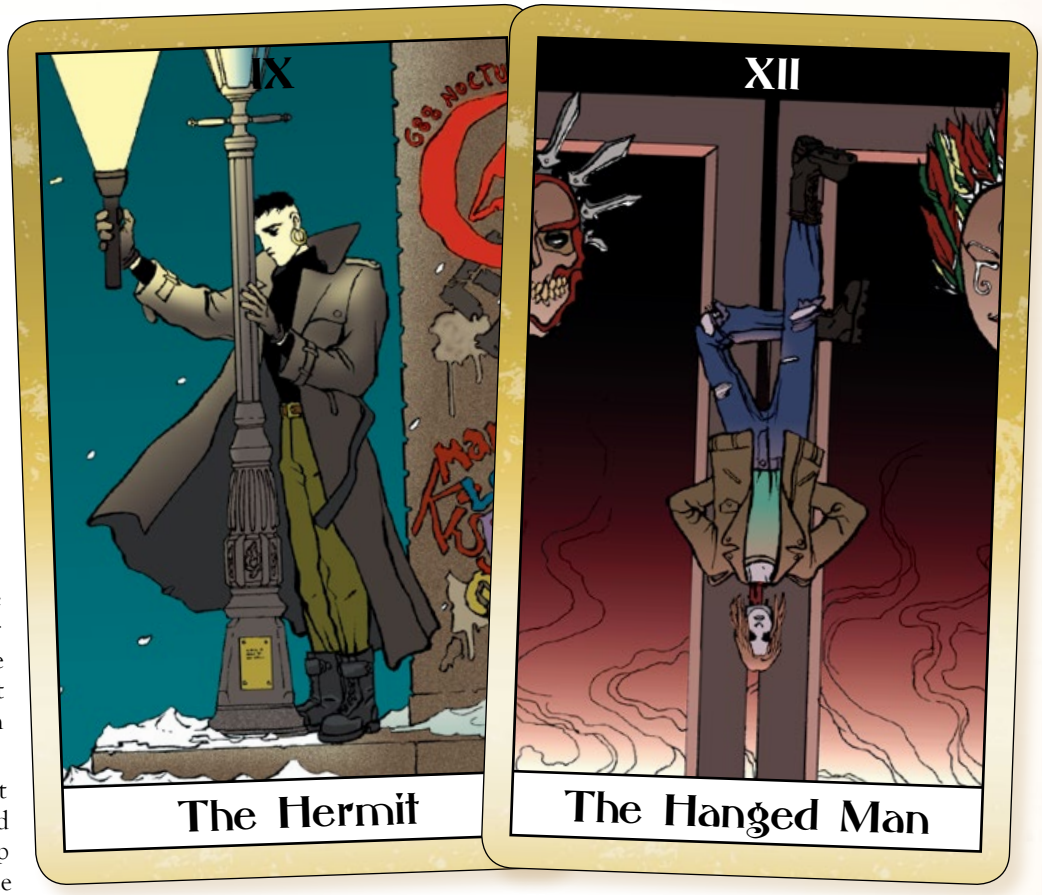
Moving through the Sleepers' world can be like trying to fly while your neighbors clip your wings. Magick doesn't work right when people can't accept its possibilities. A suffocating weight of disbelief handicaps our greatest gifts. And so mages often get pissed off at mortal limitations and the Sleepers who seem to hold us down.

For obvious reasons, this cramps our relationships with people who haven't Awakened. It's hard to love – even *tolerate* – people who cannot and will not understand your reality. The added strain of secrecy and fear erodes those bonds as well. As a result, most mages hit a Hermit stage: a point when they need to get away from the life they once knew and spend time alone or with our own kind.

This stage might be temporary, or it could last the rest of a very long life. Monasteries, laboratories, camps, castles, getaways, secret islands, hidden mountaintops, even otherworldly places carved out of reality itself – the legendary *Horizon Realms* – all provide sanctuary for mages who need time and space to figure their shit out. And although it's easy in such places to become *too* alienated and forget who and what you are (a common problem, especially for very old Awakened folk), almost every mage needs to spend a little time away from the world she once knew, if only for self-reflection's sake.

Like the Tarot Hermit, a self-reflective mage uses solitude to deepen her understanding and her Arts. Meditation, experiments, research, and Seekings help her learn things that would be difficult, if not impossible, to explore in the Sleepers' world. Ideally, though, that Hermit still keeps watch over the sleeping village down below. To many of us, Awakening is a sacred charge – a

duty we owe to Creation as a whole. The light of our awareness helps us through darkness most folks cannot penetrate.



Stagnation

It's easy to get hung up in such conflicts, especially when avoiding them. And so, we become like the Hanged Man, suspended in place while things "go to our heads." Mages become stagnant with a lust for power, stagnant in solitude, stagnant in self-indulgence or hatred or despair. We get so wrapped up in our conflicts or avoidance that we stop growing. It happens more often than you might think.

There are places out beyond the human world where mages disappear up their own asses. Intrigue and backstabbing are the order of the day. Grudges fester for decades or centuries, occasionally exploding into self-destructive duels. Fabled Doissetep shows what can happen when mages of any kind become so set in their ways that stagnation becomes entropy and entropy gives way to oblivion.

Solitary mages stagnate too. Wrapped up in their own pet concerns or trapped by fear, greed, or insanity, they wind up tangled in stagnation. Some go crazy (again, like the Marauders), and others just stay *stuck*. Outwardly powerful, they're like Scrooge before the ghosts showed up, decaying grandly in hopeless waste.

But the Hanged Man also represents transition. He can get *un*stuck by breaking his old patterns. Mages can get out of a rut by being unconventional – changing professions, factions, identities, even sexes. A dusty old wizard can become a teenage girl; an Ecstatic nymphomaniac can become a nun. Radical conversations shake the Hanged Man loose. There's even a practice called *antinomian praxis* wherein a mage breaks taboos just to learn what's on the other side of them. That's a dangerous but accepted solution – one that usually beats decay.

Resolution

So after we face all the obstacles in our Path, where does it lead from there? To *resolution*, the eventual end of the road. Whatever form it takes, we all reach that eventually. Like any mythic hero, a mage can expect a stirring climax to her tale. From apprentices to archmagi, none of us are immune.

Corruption

When you meet the Devil in the woods – and you *will*, because he's out there – beware of his *corruption*. Now, I'm not talking about the Christian Devil, although plenty of mages believe in him. I'm referring to the Tarot Devil that symbolizes pride, stagnation, temptation, and delusion. Considering our unusual powers and abilities and the strange company we keep, we mages meet *lots* of Devils, literal and otherwise. Many mages wind up corrupted by their own power, outside influence, or both.

The Nephandi choose to *become* Devils, embodying that icon's seductive majesty. And they're so skillful in the role that there's even a name, *barabbi*, which refers to mages from other factions who get converted to the Nephandic Path. They're not the only corrupters out there, though. Vampires and demons and malignant spirits excel at turning mages into pawns. Smooth-talking enemies can win us to their point of view. Even Sleepers can corrupt Awakened Ones by tempting us with money, sex, political power, religious ecstasy, or whatever other weakness a mage displays. And, of course, a faction or cabal can corrupt its members or *be* corrupted from the inside out. That sort of thing's more common than anyone wants to admit.

But the greatest form of corruption on our Path is the Devil we find inside. Hubris and magick make an awful combination. Drunk on our own power, we often become monsters. Jodi Blake, the Matriarch,

Future Fates: Doissetep

Perhaps the most powerful collection of wizards in all Creation, Doissetep occupies a vast, tempestuous Horizon Realm where internal and external storms never end. Dozens of Tradition mages and hundreds, maybe thousands, of their companions, maintain a perpetual game of scheme and counter-scheme in that place.

In the "official" **Mage** metaplot, the Hermetic stronghold Doissetep winds up destroying itself on November 10, 1997. A so-called "Ascension Warrior" knocks the whole field of mystic dominos over. Infiltrating Doissetep, this Great Betrayer – supposedly the reincarnation of the Traditions' greatest failure – tips the balance of power inside the stronghold. Within minutes, the entire place implodes from an escalating internal war. Hermetic Archmaster Porthos Fitz-Empress sacrifices both his power and his life to contain the damage. Even then, the repercussions echo through various worlds, killing and injuring hundreds of people who've never even heard of mages.

In the aftermath, a "war in the ruins" erupts as various parties fight to claim Doissetep's treasures. This war spirals into greater levels of devastation until the Avatar Storm finally cuts that conflict and its combatants off from the earthly realm.

Doissetep's literal and symbolic annihilation is a pivotal event in **Mage** history. Even so, it's an option you could approach from one of three different ways:

- **Doissetep is history:** It happened. The place is dust.
- **Doissetep survived:** Despite extensive damage, the stronghold survived. Perhaps it has been rebuilt in a newer, more egalitarian form; or maybe it's still a retreat for crazy wizards who'd prefer to plot in the Otherworlds than face reality back home. If the Avatar Storm struck, then Doissetep may have become an Umbral ghost-realm, haunted by the disembodied spirits of its many residents.
- **The fall never happened:** Doissetep is still a conspiracy-wracked haven for Tradition wizardry. There was no Ascension Warrior, no explosion, no War in the Ruins. All is more or less as it was in the 1993 **Book of Chantries**. Cranky old Porthos might even be alive, still guiding younger mages on an ever-growing quest for personal and global Ascension.

For details about Doissetep and its destruction, see **The Book of Chantries**, **Mage 2nd Edition**, the Ascension Warrior novel trilogy, **The Book of Mirrors**, and **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures**.

Future Fates: The Great Betrayer

The most infamous criminal in Tradition history, the Great Betrayer was an alchemist who destroyed the First Cabal. Heylel Teomim – a hermaphrodite who had combined two souls into a single body – was supposedly destroyed by Gilgul. Over 500 years later, Heylel supposedly returns as the so-called Ascension Warrior. Claiming to be the Great Betrayer reborn, the Warrior destroys Doissetep, shatters other realms, and leads a war against the Council of Nine before apparently being killed a second time.

Is the Ascension Warrior really Heylel? No one's sure. There are reasons to believe it and reasons not to. The event cripples the Traditions, though, leaving the field wide open for an apparent Technocratic victory. Whatever the truth might turn out to be, the Ascension Warrior's claim leaves the permanence of Gilgul in doubt.

Who was this mysterious figure in your chronicle?

- **He made a heroic mess:** Whatever that person's true nature may have been, the Ascension Warrior left a titanic impression upon the Traditions – one from which they might not have recovered.
- **He wasn't what they said he was:** Although some lunatic claiming to be the Great Betrayer ran loose a few years back, Heylel's impression upon the world was significantly less than the carnage inflicted in the metaplot.
- ***What* Ascension Warrior?** That stuff never happened, or else it happened in a very different form. Perhaps the Warrior is still out there somewhere...

For details about the Great Betrayer, see **The Fragile Path**, **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, and the Ascension Warrior novels.

the death-mage Voormas... their names echo through our ranks in infamy because they consider themselves the ultimate authorities of life and death. And *that*, my friend, is a corruption we all face.

Every mage has a Devil in the mirror. The fact that we can do what we do makes us vulnerable to his seductions. Thankfully, we can choose another side of this icon – the Devil's creative cleverness – to sidestep this fate. By breaking our old patterns and turning pride inside out, we can instead become The Star: an inspired and rejuvenated soul.

Imprisonment

You might think that no prison could hold someone with our powers... and you'd be wrong. *Imprisonment* of one kind

or another is a terribly common fate – the Tower in our Tarot spread. I'm not referring to the mortal sorts of jail, although they can be surprisingly effective too. I mean mystic imprisonment, mental snares, and the awful prison of the Self.

Mages and other entities have ways of dealing with their foes. Some craft cages out of impossible materials, and others can seal you in a bubble and send you into space. Spirit beings have prisons of their own: hells, soul cages, pools from which no one can escape. The *Paradox spirits* – "reality cops" with a nasty sense of justice – can imprison us within the effects of our own spells. The worst prisons, though, are the ones we make within ourselves...

Quiet

Occasionally, we just snap. And when a mage snaps, she enters *Quiet*: a state of metaphysical insanity. Think of it as reality overload. A mage's Will flips inside out and traps the mage inside. At the lower levels, this Quiet spawns strange delusions, the *hobgoblins* of magickal minds. Certain types of Quiet can produce fearsome mania, a potent sense of denial, or an obsessive affinity with death. A serious Quiet can even trap a wizard in a self-made prison. While her body's catatonic, her consciousness goes elsewhere.

Where *does* her consciousness go? No one's quite sure.

Like many aspects of the magickal Path, there's no firm definition for a Quiet's destination. Some folks think of Quiet as a monumental Seeking, but others see it as an Avatar's punishment. It could simply be like a massive mystic acid trip, where nothing's actually real and yet it all seems *more* real than reality itself. It's a puzzle. We *do* know this much, though: some mages come back from Quiets quickly, others take their time getting back, and some never come back at all.

In Tarot terms, think of Quiet as The Moon: a state of delusion and instability. A mage finds herself swamped by conflicting emotions and perceptions, none of which seem to fit coherently together. That mage wanders through a mental hall of mirrors, hoping to find one that sends her home. Until she works through the confusion, she's suspended from her Path.

It's been said that the Marauders exist in states of walking Quiet, little bubbles of portable madness. Like projective schizophrenics, they share that madness with everyone nearby. Every so often, they become so crazy that Reality opens up and swallows them whole. Where they go from *there* is anybody's guess, and I hope to never find out.

Slavery

At the foot of the Devil's throne, chains bind captives to his presence. And that's *slavery*, where masters of reality become servants instead. Pacts, bargains, obligations, and the vampiric Blood Bond can turn us into slaves. That's a disgrace to the mystic Path, but it's a sadly common fate.

Faust – the patron saint of bad ideas – is a perfect symbol for this sort of trap. He literally made deals with a devil but didn't bother looking at the fine print. You'd be surprised how many mages do this sort of thing. Hermetics forging infernal pacts, Ecstatics scoring a massive fix, Technocrats convincing

themselves that the ends justify the means... their name is Legion, and their fate is chains.

Enslaved mages might not ever recognize those chains. They trundle around thinking that they're kings of the world while their masters pull the puppet strings. Folks become enslaved to ideologies too; the Technocracy provides the obvious example, but some Tradition mages are just as bad. We like to think that just because we *can*, we *should* – and that's a trap. When you blow up half the neighborhood for what you believe to be a good cause, you're a slave to that cause even when you can't see the chains.

Doissetep became a house of slaves. The Technocracy did too. Buddhism claims that we're *all* slaves – servants of delusions, sensations, and greed. Power, then, is the ultimate slavery. When you have it, freedom looks like loss.

Death

The obvious termination, death waits for every mage. You can cheat it for centuries – many mages have. Eventually, though, we *are* mortal. Whether we meet the Reaper in a storm of bullets or just pass away from old age in a comfy bed, he comes for all of us in time.

In Tarot, Death isn't just an ending. It's a transition from one state to another. Stuck in old patterns, a mage might actually be freed by symbolic or even literal death. With magick, after all,

flesh and spirit are our toys. We can stretch them out, cut them short, change them into some new form. Mages who specialize in the Life Sphere know how flexible life and death can be.

And then there's *reincarnation* – a fact of life in our world. Despite the presence of heavens and hells, there's a cycle that cannot be denied. Certain mages, like the Akashics and Chakravanti, step on and off of that cycle, charting their lives in *incarnations*, not in years. As Verbena witches know, life, death, and rebirth are part of every mage's world. And so, inevitable as it is, death's not always the end of the Path. For some mages, it's a large yet temporary change.

Gilgul

Every so often, though, that cycle stops. *Gilgul*, the dreaded destruction of one's soul, ends the magick permanently. Supposedly the shredding of an Avatar, "Gilgul" means *metamorphosis*... in this case, the transformation of a mage into a Sleeper again.

Although both the Traditions and Technocracy use Gilgul as punishment, they're not the only ones who can end the Path this way. A vampire's Embrace, for example, is a form of Gilgul: the mage becomes a vampire – powerful in his way, but no longer a true mage. Some spirits, it's been said, can strip away Awakening too. Severe Quiets have been known to leave mages powerless, and one theory – thankfully unproven – states that ultimate victory in the Ascension War will put every rival mage to Sleep forever.

Gilgul isn't physical death... but it might as *well* be. Once your magick has been stripped away, life typically seems worthless. Tradition justice usually follows Gilgul with physical execution too, although the Technocracy and Nephandi have been known to enslave ex-mages afterward. A form of excommunication, Gilgul removes a willworker's ability to use her mystic Will. But is it truly permanent? It supposedly *is*, but there may be one or two exceptions...

Prosperity

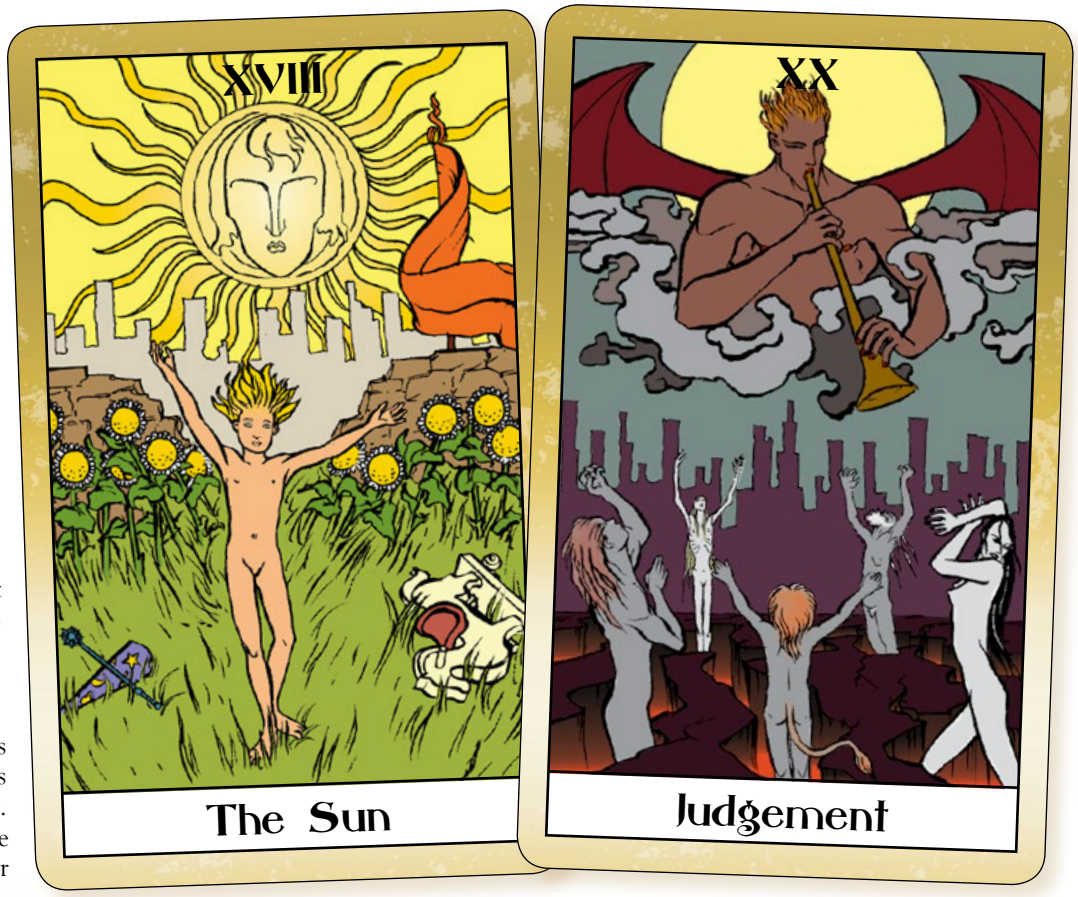
But not all endings are terrible. Some Paths climax in prosperity. Certain mages achieve great wealth and power without becoming monsters. Reaching beyond The Moon, they find The Sun and use their Arts to become beacons in a world of darkness.

The Tarot Sun is clarity, success, and liberation, a joyful ride through the garden of plenty. Its light brings joy and happiness. Mages who value wealth can grow quite rich; those who cherish influence might remake their corners of the world. Prosperity *can* be selfish, but ideally a prosperous person shares her good fortune with the community at large. There are mages who end famines, mages who stop wars, mages whose magicks bring new technologies or faiths to their people. In the old days, it was said, these saints spread God's benevolence across the world. Why should today be any different?

To give credit to the Technocrats, prosperity has been that faction's greatest gift. They truly *have* helped humanity at large. Electricity, machines, medicines, and even – some claim – civil rights have supposedly come from Technocratic hands. And so, if other mages want to win hearts and minds to their cause, those other factions must offer prosperity in return. Expecting folks to be servants in your magick castle is *not* a recipe for success. If you want to be a god of your world, you might as well be the best *kind* of god you can be.

Sacrifice

The finest mages sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Like Oak Kings and Anointed Ones, they step down from their mystic thrones in order to fulfill a pressing need. Archmaster Porthos, one



of the most powerful mages who ever lived, sacrificed his life and magick in order to contain the shock of Doissetep's destruction. Other mages have harrowed hells, suffered torture, and literally given blood to leave the world better than it had been before.

Even without death, sacrifice is a traditional mystic technique. The Verbena may be the most notorious examples, but other groups use blood sacrifice as well. What *is* the Eucharist, after all, but a symbolic shared sacrifice? Just as Odin gouged out his eye and hung upon the World Tree, certain mages give up precious things, even their lives, in order to achieve a greater end.

Transformation

Beyond The Sun, we find Judgment. Also called *Aeon*, this card reflects transformation. Like a greater Death, such transformations signal rebirth. In some ways, then, this step of the Path resembles a mage's Awakening. Transformation heralds a dramatic shift. From that point on, the mage is no longer the person she'd been before.

In Smith's Tarot, Judgment sounds a trumpet to call up naked souls. A transformed mage, in the same vein, hears the call of her spirit. For Awakened Ones with faith, like the Celestial Choristers, this stage signifies reunion with the One from whom all things flow. Other mages, like Technocratic devotees, regard transformation as a merging process in which flawed individuals join a perfect whole. You could consider this a *bodhisattva state*, hanging on the cusp of Nirvana yet staying behind to shepherd other souls to bliss, or a return to the elements or animals whose perfection we forget in our quest to become human. It's all the same thing, really, though neither side would admit as much. Regardless of the terminology, this culmination to a mage's Path brings her into some new state. Whether angel, cyborg, animal, or saint, that mage has been reborn.

Transcendence

Perhaps the highest goal of any mage, *transcendence* brings us beyond all earthly cares or limits. Dancing with The World, we hover outside of life and death. This, it's been said, is the realm of the *Oracles*: mystic figures who had once supposedly been mages but now understand the All. Or perhaps it's heaven, Nirvana, or a return to the cosmic Void. It might be none or all of them at once. If you have to try to understand it, you haven't reached it yet.

Transcendence could be seen as personal Ascension, too. Reaching this stage, the mage lets go of everything that binds him to our mortal plane. Power and the need for it are gone; pride dissipates like mist in the sun. The paradox of trying to be both human and divine reveals itself to be a Zen koan, clapping with no hands at all. By being what it is, this stage transcends definition. It simply *IS*. That's all.

The Capital "T" Truth

And so here's a Truth for all of us. One with a great big capital "T":

Truth is an illusion.

"Reality" belongs in quotes.

All of us, mage and mortal, create the world we share. Whether we want it to or not, for better *and* for worse, it reflects the things we bring to it.

Some of us wield more power over it than others, but none of us are helpless.

Your will reshapes reality threefold. What you *Will*, will *be*.

Heaven and hell are both in your hands. And so if you want a better world, then go out there and make it *happen*.

Not with toys or wars or fireballs down Main Street, but with an open heart, a ready mind, and the courage to look beyond yourself even as you watch your own reflection and wonder where your next move waits.

Chapter Two: Magick
The Art of Reality

The laws of Magick are the laws of Nature.
– Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*

The Fool

Associations: ***Impulse; travel; the here-and-now; childlike enthusiasm; recklessness; whimsy; freedom from inhibition; being open to experience...***

"BURN IT DOWN!"

The cry echoes from the stage where a tricky pixie howls her defiance at the crowd. That crowd responds, picking up her cry and amplifying it in voices louder than the amps. Whirling figures spin brightly colored circles of limbs and clothing, some trailing hoops or balls of fire in hypnotic mathematical designs.

The night cracks with sacred passions.

Lee Ann Milner feels the cry rise from deep inside her chest. As the words leave her lips, she recalls the breaths that birthed them and sees the next steps where her feet will fall. Time blurs for a liquid instant, held and blended into pastpresentfuturenow.

The pixie and her band caper like mad things. Their devotions whip the crowd to multicolored froth. Sweat gleams raw in electronic glare. Beyond the seething pit of limbs, a galaxy of colors illuminates the night. Children run free of all constraint; elders fold close to one another, pages in a book written by spirits and skin. "BURN IT DOWN," they cry as one – calling not for violence but transcendence.

Burn the past. Burn the fear. Burn the boundaries of potential.

Burn the cold fire of freedom.

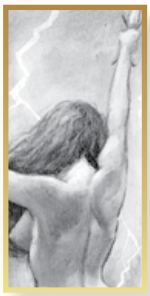
Burn the stasis down.

Lee Ann's bones quiver with the press of union. Through closed eyes, she sees the crowd. We are Shangri-La, they cry, each wedded to a single whole. No divisions here – no blocks, no predation.

In a lingering instant, the sacred space unfolds.

And long after it will end, its memory shapes the fires of ever-burning bones.

Your Art and Science



According to the esteemed Damiana Silverwitch, "Magick is the fine art of getting off your ass and doing something." That blunt poetry reveals a simple truth: *magick is a verb*. It's active, a means of accomplishing an end. For all the high-flown metaphysical gibberish attached to its concepts, the core of magick can be boiled down to one word: *action*.

There's another word you could attach to magick, an apparent heresy that's no less true: *technology*. See, the word *technology* means, in one sense, "skillful knowledge of the Art." And although *logos* can also be translated as "word" and "speech," that Greek root word carries a connotation of deep spiritual connection and revelation – a sense that "I and the Art and the Knowledge are One."

As Crowley said, magick is an art *and* a science. It expresses inner truth through refined understanding. And so, when you want to wrap your head around the elusive concepts involved with magick, just keep this in mind: *Magick is the artful science of doing things*.

What *sorts* of things? And how can you do them? Let's take a look at that...

The Basics

Can *everyone* do magick? In one sense, yes. Every conscious person – and by "people" I don't mean only human beings – is an agent of intentional change. To rephrase Descartes, "You *think*, therefore you *do*." By deciding for yourself what you want and then deciding how you'll get it, you commit actions that move your world forward. When you make a choice, you alter your world. So in that sense, every thinking entity performs magick.

But not like *we* do.

Miracles at Hand

As I said earlier, mages are agents of change. Our decisions reshape reality in a large scale. And because we have Awakened to that possibility, our knowledge goes deeper and our changes get bigger than the things unAwakened people can do.

But there's a catch: our choices have bigger consequences too.

Once we learn what we can do and refine enough Enlightened Will to do it, we can weave miracles. Awakened mages call down lightning, look through time, manipulate the elements. At the higher levels of our achievement, we can transmute objects, project our consciousness, be in several places at once, or sidestep gulfs of time and distance. Yes, we can even create life. In that sense, then, we become like gods.

And if you're familiar with mythology, you realize just how much trouble gods can cause.

No Free Rides

Nothing happens in a vacuum. The things you do come back to you. When you Will a major change, you change other things beyond your control. A large part of magick, then, involves the wisdom of knowing *what* to change, *how* to change it, when *not* to change it, and how to prepare for the consequences when you do. Because there are *always* consequences. There are no free rides on the magick train.

Those consequences can be dark miracles too. We can go insane, disappear, alter the world around us with our presence. We might attract the attention of uncanny entities, piss off the locals, or even explode. The bigger our changes, the bigger the risks. When you gamble big, you can lose big. A mage who wants to survive her nascent godhood learns how to cast her magick in ways that risk the smallest backlash for the biggest gains.

When you learn to use magick, you dip into the deeper levels of your self and your surroundings. You learn how to – and how *not* to – make choices. You learn how to change reality to suit your needs. And you learn that, in doing so, you can wrap yourself in the paradox of standing in two realities at the same time... and one of them, eventually, has to give.

The Paradox Effect

Think of magick as Thunderdome: two realities enter, one reality leaves. Ideally, the one that triumphs is the one you create.

If it's *not*, then you have a problem.

We tend to call this problem *the Paradox Effect*, or simply *Paradox*... yes, with capitalized letters to show how big and important an idea it is. Because this kind of Paradox can kick your ass. There are a million metaphysical explanations for what it is, why it works, and what we can do to get around it, but the simplest explanation is this: *Paradox is what happens when two visions of reality exist in the same place at the same time until one of them gives up.*

And if *your* reality gives up, you're in for a world of hurt.

The Faces of Paradox

This is where a lot of those consequences I just mentioned rear their ugly little heads. For whatever reason – and I tell you this truly, mages come up with *lots* of reasons for such things! – Paradox puts a nasty face on Reality's displeasure. Sometimes that face is literal, the so-called Paradox Spirits who come along like cops to cart offenders off to reality jail. It occasionally wears the face you give it, like the *hobgoblins* of not-so-little minds, which turn your greatest or most hidden fears into spiritual manifestations that punish you. It can lash metaphysical whip-burns into your skin, wrap your perceptions into madness or self-recursive loops called Quiet, or simply blow you up and pop you like some self-important balloon.

Static Magic, Dynamic Magick, and Technomagick

Plenty of beings, in the World of Darkness, can do magical things. And in game terms, the primary difference between the mystical powers of werewolves, vampires, hedge magicians, and other entities, and the reality-warping powers of a mage, is the difference between *static magic* and *dynamic magick*. Although the difference between them isn't often obvious to the characters themselves, there's a significant difference between them in terms of game-based effects.

- ***Static magic*** conforms to rigid constraints. The Obfuscation Discipline, for example, has a range of effects that hide or disguise the vampire; all of them, however, have specific things they can do within a small variety of level-based powers. The same's true for Garou Gifts, changeling cantrips, and so on. A variety of magic-using humans can use such powers too: hunters, psychics, hedge magicians, etc. In all cases, though, their powers operate within tight parameters of what *is* and *is not* possible with them. As magical as they are, their effects – both within the story world and within the game's rules – are static. Whether it's because Kindred and Garou have awakened their spirits to a predetermined path, because centuries of folklore have integrated their powers into reality, or maybe elements of both explanations, the effects and limitations remain constant and Paradox-free.
- ***Dynamic magick*** is open-ended. Although it usually involves tools and rituals, the effects – or, more properly, capital-E *Effects* – of such magick are incredibly flexible. In various editions of **Mage**, the "k" referring to such magick is either used or discarded; either way, the game systems involved are the same. The character has a wide range of options based on the degree of his knowledge and Awakened Will; that way, the player gets to define how her mage employs the Arts, rather than be limited to a bunch of narrowly defined spells. The price of those options is Paradox. When you rework the essence of reality, you risk getting smacked for your presumption.
- ***Techomagick*** (without or without the "k") refers to dynamic magick that requires technological instruments and procedures. Cybernetic gear, energy rifles, high-speed calculations, and other science- or pseudoscience-based activities and gear focus the intentions of a technomancer, so that mage almost inevitably relies upon her gear in order to get things done. Even so, the Effects of her magick remain dynamic. She may need her computer in order to get things done, but *with* it she still has an Awakened mage's range of possibilities.

Although certain people refer to the Technocracy or other technomancers as "static mages," there's really no such thing in game terms. All mages, as noted earlier, work with dynamic magick, even when they don't define their powers that way. In the setting, your characters might never understand the difference between a hedge wizard's spells and the powers of an Awakened mage. Your *players*, however, will.

In some respects, the Night-Folk have certain advantages when using their powers against a mage; that mage, however, has a vast array of potential powers, as opposed to a few limited ones. Although the vampire might be able to dominate a person's mind without risking Paradox, the mage – though she risks a backlash – can use the Mind Sphere in ways no vampire could ever dream of.

As a dude named Zerox once said, Paradox is Jiminy Cricket with a chainsaw. The more material you give it to work with, the larger and scarier its saw.

Resonance, Karma, and Synergy

On a subtle but more pervasive level, the echoes of your magick can manifest as *Resonance*. If you think of an act of magick as a drumstick hitting a cymbal, then Resonance is that fading vibration you still hear after the initial crash dies down. Resonance follows a mage in the wake of all she does, echoing what she does with her magick... and often echoing the intentions and emotions *behind* that magick, too.

In yet another level of paradox (small "p" this time), the Resonance effects often create their own strange sense of reality disruption. A fire-witch, for example, might have uncomfortably warm skin, a faint scent of smoke, and a tendency – in extreme cases – to accidentally set small fires just by touching something. Now, Resonance is often considered to be a minor manifestation of the Paradox Effect... and yet, its own effects can be noticeably weird in and of themselves. It seems odd that a ripple in Reality could be more obvious than the acts of magick that cause that ripple in the first place. But there you are. It happens. Thankfully, Resonance manifestations do not appear to invoke even more Paradox energies in the process of being strange. They can, however, make things difficult when a mage wants to stay on the down-low and remain hidden, but her Resonance echoes stir shit up all around her.

Some folks consider Resonance to be karma, but that's based on a misunderstanding of what karma means. In Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics, Karma is the force and momentum of accumulated lifetimes, in which past actions shape present and future circumstances. Although the principles of Karma and Resonance are related, Karma depends upon the idea of reincarnation, whereas Resonance is based in what you do in this lifetime. Even so, lots of mages still invoke the "Karma's a real bitch" argument when they talk about Resonance.

There might be another sort of Resonance-effect, one that's sometimes called *Synergy*. With Synergy, the echo comes off of an external source – a haunted house, for example – and bounces off the mage, becoming part of her metaphysical vibrations. Some folks consider Resonance and Synergy to be the same thing, but others consider them to be different

What's Synergy?

Synergy and Resonance are two sides of the same coin. Various **Mage** books define Resonance in different ways – sometimes as the echo of a mage's deeds, occasionally as a mage's connection to the forces of the universe. To reconcile those different definitions, **Mage 20** introduces the *optional* concept of Synergy. For more details, see the sections about Resonance in **Chapters Six** and **Ten**.

energies or deny that one or both of those energies even exist. To simplify matters, just think of things this way: you change the world, and the world changes you as well.

Pride

Another small-p paradox comes from this magely truth: *risk nothing, gain nothing*. Unless you play chicken with Paradox, you cannot unlock your true potential. Being too safe gets you nothing in this game. A mage *must* dare to do as he or she Wills. And that daring demands *pride*.

"Don't get too proud," folks will tell you. Pride has been called the sin that goeth before a fall. The Nephandi, who proudly wear their tag "the Fallen," will tell you that pride is the ultimate source of all accomplishment. And here's the truth: they're right. Without a certain sense that you *are* better than the average person, a feeling that the things you do *should* matter, you cannot do magick and create change.

You must be proud to be a mage.

The Latin root of *pride* means "advantageous." By being Awakened, you have an advantage. In order to use it, you must be *willing* to use it. You have to see yourself as smart enough, brave enough, knowledgeable and wise enough, just plain *good* enough, to be worthy of the advantage life has given you... and of the advantages you *make* in life. Magick is the key to your universe; if and when you believe you're worthy of it, your pride can open doors that most folks don't even see.

As I mentioned earlier, what you *Will*, will *be*.

Will

That word, *Will*, is the heart of both pride and magick. It signifies intention, goodness, excellence. Capped off with a great big "W," Will reflects your determination to make things happen in accord with your desires. And though Crowley was hardly the first or last word in magick, he was utterly right on that score.

We mages are the most determined motherfuckers on the planet. We *have* to be, to do what we do.

Now, lots of folks will argue with me. They'll say that magick comes from spirits, gods, or technology. It's a gift, some claim, and they're right – it *is*. But until and unless we're *Will-ing* to use it, that gift just sits there in the box, unwrapped, unused, unenjoyed.

And what fun is being a mage unless you're willing to open the box and use what you've received?

Hubris

Did you ever have a toy that you ruined by playing too hard with it? Or have you ever taken some gift, skill, or talent you had and then made a complete mess of things because you weren't careful with how you used it? That's what happens, on a really big scale, when you get careless with Will, pride, and magick – you break things.

And I call that carelessness *hubris*: destructive, overwhelming pride.

To the Greeks who coined the term, hubris is the shadow-side of excellence. It's that moment when *Damn, I look good...* becomes *...so I can do whatever the hell I want*. If you've ever met one of those arrogant assholes (and face it, we *all* have) who uses his or her looks or charm or money or whatever in order to feel better at your expense, you understand why hubris sucks. In Greek lore, hubris can suck a person into a vortex of self-inflicted ruin, taking everything around him down as well.

Mages do that shit all the time. Not just the Technocrats or Nephandi, but *all of us*.

The Ascension War is what happens when a bunch of proud Will-workers get so full of themselves that they decide to remake the world in their own image. Cyborgs wind up stalking through the night. Mad scientists create monstrosities. Witches curse their enemies until flesh slides off of bones. Ecstatics try to make folks see the pretty colors that they see, and that trip drives those folks insane.

Paradox can be seen as Reality bitch-slapping mages to *knock that shit off!*

It's a fine line we dance, then, between pride and hubris, between the Will to power and the power to destroy – and the paradox of doing both for what look like all the right reasons in our eyes.

Power

And yet, power is *fun*. It *should* be. Like I said, you've got a gift. Enjoy it.

We're surrounded by a world that tells us *not* to be powerful. Leave that stuff to the experts, they say... the "experts" being themselves. Give up your power. Be a good little drone. Let the big people take care of the hard stuff for you.

Fuck. That.

If you're a mage, then you *are* one of the big people. Magick is the proof. When you weave your Arts, you make things happen. And that's *BIG*.

That's *power*.

And that power scares people.

In the old days, folks made bonfires for people like us. It didn't matter then if we were witches, heretics, people whose science threatened their flat little world, or if we were simply too cool, too pretty, too damn good at what we did. These days, those bonfires look more like flame wars on the Internet... unless, of course, you attract the attention of the people who still *will* burn your ass literally to death because you threaten their reality. And in this rotten world, those people are out there – and quite often, they are *us*.

If you're a mystic mage, you'll have Technocrats coming to shut you down. If you're a Technocrat, those damned Reality Deviants twist your world up like pretzels. The Mad Ones want us all down the rabbit hole with them, and the Fallen want us to dance to the world's eventual damnation. Even within our own ranks, the people we consider friends or allies might kick our ass for being too free, too restrictive, too intuitive, too scholastic, for spending too much time online or for running naked through the woods. Power threatens power. Pride hates to be proved wrong.

The paradox of pride and power both exalts us and destroys us.

It's not easy being a mage.

But y'know what? It's worth the pain.

Better to burn bright and illuminate your world than to forever smolder in the darkness, wondering what you could have been.

Who We Are, What We Do

So how do we do it? How does it work? That's the mystery – a realm of myth and poetry with lots of theories and few hard answers. Every faction and philosopher has a pet genesis. Ultimately, this is what we know: we do what we do because we understand that we can do it – not just on an intellectual level but on a cosmic one as well.

All Into Many Into Us

A popular myth insists that All were originally One. That One fractured into Many, and that Many become *us*. Now, whether "us" means the cavemen, the angels, demigods, or heroes is open for debate. Myths refer to the *Wyck*, primordial mages whose deeds inspired the tales of Olympians, Aryans, Tuatha de Dannan, Nephilim, and so on. Supposedly, these "pure ones" (I know, I know – *I'm* not the one who named them)

had powers that made Creation dance to their tune. How true or exaggerated are these myths? Who knows? There are folks who claim to have been there at the time, but as with so many things in a mage's world, the truth is in the eye of the beholder.

In time, these entities refined their powers into Arts that we now call *magick*. Some drew their Arts from deep inside themselves, and others begged their favors from their gods. Still others built technologies – language, math, art, and machines – that helped them do the things they did with some sense of reliability. And then, the tales say, they taught other people how to do those things too. Religions, rituals, technologies, and trade helped uplift the human animal into what we'd eventually call civilization. Thanks to magick, humanity prospered.

Conflict and Change

But we humans are a fractious lot. Even at our best, we're angels wrapped in monkey-skins. The war of heaven plays out inside every human heart, and whether its origins come from some serpentine tempter wrapped around the Trees of Life and Knowledge, from the whims of gods, from infernal rebels, or from our own selfish genes, the conflicts are the same. We fight. We kill. We die. We despair. Given all the gifts of heaven, we run wild in hell. Is this a cosmic prank, original sin, a grotesque illusion, or simply the drive of life and death and rebirth again? That depends on who you ask. For whatever reason, a divide grew between the Awakened and the Sleepers... and between the Awakened and each other.

Some people claim that these divisions came about because magick was abused. According to the Technocratic gospel, mad wizards enslaved humanity until brave heroes used their Arts and Science to throw down the sorcerers. Mystic mages claim that early Technocrats deployed empires to crush their neighbors and unite the masses under technological rule. Both history and religion show rival nations rising and conquering one another in the name of this god or that dynasty. There was magick on all sides of such wars, and the hatreds they forged have never been undone.

The history of magick is the history of conflict. Perhaps this is the way of our world – to grow, to devour, to live at the cost of other lives until death turns us into food for future generations. That's how Nature works, with or without our help. Magick gives us a say in the direction of our lives, but it has yet to change this pattern. Truth be told, magick and mages often depend upon upheaval. Conflict, after all, forces us to learn and grow, innovate and change. Is it any wonder, then, that mages – agents of Change – spend so much time at war?

Awakened Enlightenment

In the course of all these transformations, it became obvious that some of us could do what most other folks could not. Aware of our power, we learned how to use it. Some mages call this Awakening, others Enlightenment, and still others refuse to give it a name at all. By any name or none, such awareness allows us to do things other people cannot do.

The questions about whether or not all people could once perform magick, or whether or not all people *should* perform magick, get tangled into endless arguments. Such things are not important now. The vital fact is that right here, right now, and for as long as anyone can honestly remember, we Awakened or Enlightened folks can do things that transcend normal human capabilities. *That* much is a given.

And it does not come easily.

Maybe once upon a long time ago, Awakened people just naturally woke up knowing what they could do. That's not how it works anymore. These days, Awakening usually involves some heavy-duty clue-bat cracked upside your skull. After it, the world no longer looks the way it once did before. This can be terrifying; like I said earlier, power is *scary*. Mentors and companions can provide a smoother transition, but most mages – at least these days – wake up thrashing around in metaphysical panic attacks. The world gets turned inside out by such wild talents, and the end of Sleep produces monsters.

Genius and the Avatar

Thankfully, mages come with a built-in guidance system, that "Holy Guardian Angel" I mentioned earlier: the *Avatar*. This innate Genius provides inspiration for a budding mage. Depending on who you ask, this godly co-pilot might be a previous incarnation, a helpful spirit, a reflection of your Greater

A History of Mages and Magick

For a detailed look at the complex saga of mages, their societies, and their effect upon the world, check out ***An Awakened History*** at the beginning of **Chapter Five**.

Wild Talent

A mage whose magick has not been trained or refined has what's called a *wild talent*. His Awakened powers function, but he has little or no control over what they do. This tends to make that mage a danger to himself and everyone else within reach. The various magickal disciplines – even the darkest forms of sorcery – provide ways to channel that raw power toward a less-destructive end. Without them, as shown in **Chapter Five**, an untrained mage may well become a Marauder.

For the game rules surrounding wild talent, see **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 527-528)**.

Self, or even a delusion cooked up by a mind that's trying to rationalize what you just realized you can do. Call it what you will, this divine shard provides a road map for magick's Path. Because of it, we begin to sense the deeper levels of reality... and to manipulate them, too.

Quintessence Energy, Patterns, and Doors

The Avatar helps you look past the illusions of form and substance and to realize that everything is composed of the energy called *Quintessence*. This energy settles into *Patterns* that we perceive as solid forms. When you spot the energy and see the Patterns and recognize on an instinctive and intellectual level that *you can change them*, you feel those keys to reality start to rattle in your hands. The *Spheres*, which I'll describe shortly, are metaphors for the different sorts of energetic Patterns you can unlock... the doors, if you will, of Creation itself.

Skating on Thin Ice

This all sounds obvious. But like ice skating, it's a lot more challenging than it looks. You've got an entire life's worth of conditioning that tells you that fog is not a rock is not a bird is not an airplane. The ways in which those Patterns interact, and the ways in which Quintessence flows and hovers within them, are tricky as hell. Mages spend decades, even centuries, learning how to make them dance to the desired tunes. Again like an ice skater, a mage trains herself to flow and bend like energy does, to master the subtle quirks and shifts that allow her to glide instead of crash. It takes training, focus, and tons of practice before you can juggle the Spheres. Your *mind* might grasp the concept, and your *spirit* might be willing to turn those keys, but until you attain a point of integration where all the right muscles work all the right ways, you're essentially skating on thin ice with cinderblocks strapped to your feet.

Focus, Paradigm, Practice, Instruments, and Arete

To provide blades for her intentions, each mage must find a *focus* that works for her. Drawn from her *paradigm* – the model of belief that reflects her view of the world – this focus shapes the tools she employs, the rituals she performs, the things she can do when she starts skating across Creation's ice. It'll probably decide her choice of friends, definitely influence the style of her practice, and often determine the enemies who'll try to block her Path. It's belief, you see, that turns the keys and oils up the locks for us.

Like unAwakened folks, mages take our beliefs seriously. Those beliefs shape everything we are, everything we do, every tool within our grasp. Those tools – another form of focus – become symbolic reflections of our beliefs. We use brews to distill our plans into actions, graphs to chart our potential for success, prayers to call in favors from our gods, swords to cut our Will into the air. A mage employs instruments and rituals, devices and technologies to shape and direct and forge her Path. Without them, she's just out there standing on the ice.

Mythic Threads and Hypernarratives

Certain practices and instruments employ *Mythic Threads*: symbols that carry lots of metaphysical weight within the Consensus. Tarot cards, voodoo dolls, full moons, fog... such symbols command respect because of their deep ties to the Collective Unconscious. In order to be effective, though, the Threads in question must fit a given mage's focus. A cyborg who's trying to use Tarot cards is running against his programming, so to speak, and they won't work nearly as well for him as they might in the hands of a bewitching fortune-teller.

Information Age mages have their own sort of Mythic Threads: *hypernarratives* composed of common media tropes. Car chases, exploding gas tanks, flying through the air with both guns blazing – such images have burnt themselves into the collective metastory. Essentially, a hypernarrative trope makes you a hero in the story of media-age mythology. For all practical purposes, then, a hypernarrative is a Mythic Thread for our era. The difference between them is simply a matter of archetypal traditions versus media consciousness – just a few retellings and generations away from being the same thing.

Growing Beyond Focus

Of course, the Masters say, both the tools *and* the ice are just illusions. If and when you achieve enough excellence in your pursuits – that sublime degree of Arete– you'll realize that you can skate *without* the goddamned skates and that the ice is only there because you think it is. This is the greatest kind of Awakening, the level where you begin to transcend the illusions of our world. Mages who attain this point are among the most powerful of our kind... though not always the most *wise*.

Belief too easily becomes fanaticism. All too often, the man who knows, without a doubt, that what he believes is *true* insists that everyone *else* must believe it too. You don't need to be an Islamist Jihadi or Evangelical whackjob to demand that *your* reality must be the *only* reality. Sometimes you just need to be a mage who's let magick go to his head. As a result, Master mages often become tyrants, enforcing their Will upon the rest of us. That's another magely paradox: transcendent understanding often breeds stagnation... and, with fearsome ease, becomes chaos.

Consensus and Belief

So why can't we Awakened souls do anything we please? If magick is godlike power, why don't we all just go bowling with fireballs down Main Street, USA?

Because Reality itself won't let us do that.

Imagine reality as a large body of water. You can splash around in it, channel it, swim in it, or drown in it. You can't just turn it into confetti, though, no matter how hard you wish upon a star because that water was here long before you were and will be here long after you're gone. That's the reality behind capital-R Reality. It's bigger than any mage, than any group of mages. We can work with it, but it is not, and never will be, our slave.

Reality has rules, and those rules are decided by *the Consensus*: the collective power of belief across the world. The term began as a Technocratic buzzword, but plenty of other mages use it too. Consensual reality is essentially the established baseline reality for our Earth. It's got a certain amount of give to it, but many laws are immutable. That which goes up must come down. An object in motion tends to stay in motion. An object at rest tends to stay at rest. That sort of thing. People don't morph into petunias unless acted upon by some powerful force... and if they *do*, they don't do so easily. To defy consensual reality is to invite Paradox to kick your ass.

What determines this Consensus? Good question. The origin of its laws is just one more subject of debate among mages. What we do know is this: human belief plays a strong role in the shape of the Consensus. And although mages can shift that "water" with our belief, the Sleepers outnumber us millions of times over. Their belief, ultimately, holds more water, so to speak, than our own.

Long ago, it's been said, the Consensus was far more fluid than it is these days. Because most people had little contact with cultures or communities other than their own, localized beliefs tended to shape localized Consensus. As technology, trade, and conquest spread cultures across continents, however, many beliefs became fixtures across most, if not all, of the world. Since the Age of Conquest in the late Renaissance, magick has been a lot harder to perform, its effects diminished by the weight of the Consensus. Did the Technocracy do this to our world, or is it the byproduct of Sleeper empires beyond any mage's control? Again, that's a subject of heated debate. One thing, though, is certain: mages of various factions *have* been manipulating the Consensus for centuries, if not millennia... and doing so remains a major goal for Awakened factions everywhere.

As the Baron Harkonnen said in *Dune*, *"he who controls the spice controls the universe."* Replace "spice" with "Consensus" and you've got the truth of the matter. Since the Age of Conquest, the Technocracy – and its antecedent, *the Order of Reason* – has controlled the Consensus. From time to time, other factions have retained control in various regions... and, in some areas, they still hold it. The global Consensus, though, has been in the Technocratic Union's hands for more or less the last 150 years.

But control is not command. Their grip has slipped from time to time. It almost slid away completely during both World

Focus and Belief

Your mage's belief guides the practice he pursues and the instruments he employs as part of that practice. In game terms, that means that mage's *focus*.

In older editions of **Mage**, "focus" was the term for the tools a mage used in order to cast magickal Effects. Now, though, *focus* combines the mage's beliefs about magick, the practice he follows, and the instruments he uses to direct that belief toward magickal results. All three elements are combined into a single unit: paradigm + practice + instruments = focus.

This focus depends upon the beliefs of the people involved and the practices they pursue as extensions of those beliefs. Let's say you have three mages: a Hermetic wizard, a martial artist, and an Enlightened business executive. The wizard believes that his High Ritual Magick practice gives him the keys to the universe. The martial artist believes that she's channeling her life force by practicing mental and physical discipline. The executive believes that he's an expert in the Art of Desire and that his practice helps him manipulate people in uncanny ways. In game terms, they're all doing the same thing, but the characters hold differing belief systems, and they pursue different practices. In older versions of **Mage**, these practices were called "styles"; in **Mage 20**, belief *determines* style, which in turn determines instruments.

Those instruments channel that belief and that practice into action. Our wizard enacts elaborate rituals filled with scrolls, sigils, incantations, and classical mystic tools (wands, amulets, and all that sort of thing). The martial artist performs intricate katas, impressive exercises, deep meditations, and devastating techniques. Meanwhile, the executive wears his power suit, dashes on a special cologne, deploys buzzwords like buzzbombs, and charms or crushes everyone he meets with the sheer force of his personality. Three different approaches – all of them effective and based in the beliefs of the mage who employs them. Each one uses different tools to shape the mage's intentions and then aim them toward a desired end.

For details about paradigms, practices, and tools, see **Chapters Six (pp. 256 & 259)** and **Ten (pp. 529-530 & 565-600)**.

Future Fates: The Technocratic Paradigm

According to **Mage Revised**, the Technocratic belief system wins the Ascension War by the end of the 20th century. Sleepers accept a Consensus in which science defines reality. As mentioned earlier in this book, that conclusion misses several vital elements of global belief, both back then and especially now. Nevertheless, it adds a dramatic sense of urgency to **Mage** chronicles.

Depending on your group's desires, you can assume that...

- **The Technocracy Won:** Sure, plenty of folks believe in the so-called supernatural. The dominant belief in technology, however, crushes mystical viewpoints. Anything that looks like magic is therefore vulgar anywhere on Earth.
- **Technocratic Belief Dominates Certain Parts of the World:** Technological paradigms rule most of the industrialized world, but there's a lot more flexibility than people realize. Definitions of vulgar and coincidental magick depend upon ***reality zones***, which are described in **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 611 - 617)**.
- **Reality's in Flux:** The Technocracy *seemed* to win, but that perception wasn't accurate. Reality zones determinate the boundaries of coincidental and vulgar magick, and Earth might even be sliding toward another Mythic Age in which a different paradigm dominates the world. This option would give you a much wilder **Mage** chronicle, with certain forms of obvious magick becoming coincidental (in the old form, *casual*), whereas certain approaches to technology would become vulgar. Such a high-magic chronicle would hold a very different reality than the official World of Darkness, but it would suit an End Times saga in which the promises of science had been rejected in favor of mystic chaos.

Wars, as technology reaped millions of souls with mechanized precision. People's faith in technology's blessings wavered at those points, when machines seemed monstrous. And now, some folks say, it has slid from their grasp again. Time will tell, I guess... but for now at least, a scientific belief system holds the most favorable edge in the Consensus. And so, to use magick in its classic sense these days invites disaster unless you're clever, smart, and subtle.

Coincidental Magick

The best, if not always easiest, way to avoid the Paradox Effect is to make your magick seem like a natural part of the landscape. Such *coincidental magick* appears to be totally acceptable to the local belief system. You didn't conjure an apple out of thin air, for example – you pulled it out of your backpack... and if there weren't an apple in your backpack before that point, well then, who would *know* that except for you? The baseline rule of coincidental magick is this: if a mundane witness could see you perform a magickal act, and yet accept it as a normal part of his surroundings, then it's just a coincidence that things went in your favor.

The Mythic Age

In the old days, this sort of thing was often known as *casual magick*; it had a clear and believable cause and was therefore acceptable by the beliefs of the day. Back then, however, believable meant that it fit the prevailing view of reality in that area. If folklore said that witches flew on brooms, well then, a witch could fly on a broom and be considered believable. A priest could call down fire with a prayer, and a sorcerer could curse his enemies and watch them die. Such things would never be considered coincidental today, but they were part of the belief system back then. Because almost all belief systems favored the existence of magical phenomena, modern mages often refer to this period as the *High Mythic Age*. And like so many other golden ages, it has achieved a certain glowing reverence in hindsight that clashes with the grubby truth of that era.

These days, some mystic mages want to bring back the Mythic Age or create a new one that favors their beliefs. The fact that such a shift would have radical effects on the world at large doesn't seem to bother them very much. Hey, if you can fly through the air on a broom again, who really cares if those poor misguided Sleepers remain grounded, right? That's the primary hubris of these mystic mages: *the world will be better off when we're back in charge and able to do whatever we want.*

Although the Technocrats seem like monumental killjoys in most respects, it's pretty easy to see why this sort of thing goes against their program. Such mythic reality might be cool for certain mystics, but it'd be hell on everybody else. According to the established gospel (which, like so many other things in a mage's world, might not be as true as it's supposed to be), the Order of Reason brought down the Mythic Ages by imposing a global order based upon science, not magic or religion. If that's true, however, they've done a lousy job of it. There are, after all, at least three religions that appear to think they've got special dispensations from God, and at least two of them insist that science is their enemy unless it gives them better ways to make money and kill people. And because of such cracks in the Technocratic paradigm, there's more room for mythic-style magick than is immediately obvious.

Still, coincidental magick is the safest, most reliable way to sidestep the Paradox Effect. By manifesting your Arts in ways that don't seem magickal, you avoid getting thrown in Reality Jail by manifestations of Paradox.

The Technomancer's Edge

For obvious reasons, technomancers have a monumental edge in the Paradox game. Most people in most places

throughout the modern world accept high technology as an essential part of their reality. Again, this isn't true *everywhere*, but it's a common baseline in the industrial world.

Because the dominant human belief favors technology, you've got a decent chance that sci-fi gadgetry will still be considered coincidental. A wizard firing lightning bolts out of his hands clearly does not fit into the Consensus view of reality; give that wizard a neat uniform and a pulse-rifle, though, and suddenly – thanks to decades of science-fiction films – his energy blasts seem pretty believable.

The technomancer – whether or not he belongs to the Technocracy – has an additional edge of belief as well: His technology doesn't simply fit the Consensus worldview, it also fits his own. He's not fooling the world with his technology. *He himself believes* in the power of technology. As I've said, belief is a powerful thing... and if your belief fits the Consensus, then it's got more power than if you're striving to contradict the world around you with your beliefs.

I'll put it this way: if you're raised to believe that people cannot fly, you're going against your ingrained beliefs to think that you can fly. If your beliefs include jetpacks as a potential scientific reality, though, *then your own belief* helps you to fly with one. So although many mystics claim that technomancers disguise their magick with technology, that perception isn't accurate. It's not a disguise. The technomancer truly believes in what he does.

Vulgar Magick

And then there's magick that appears to slap reality in the face – stuff that blatantly contradicts the apparent laws of the universe: summoning demons, making coaches out of pumpkins, turning vampires into lawn furniture – that sort of thing. A powerful mage *can* perform such feats, but it's not wise to do so. Such blatant magick is considered rude. Vain. *Vulgar*.

"Vulgar" originally meant *common* and referred to things and people who were unrefined. By extension, though, the word came to mean *obnoxious*, and that's how vulgar magick feels. A mage invoking vulgar magick is seen as pissing on sacred ground. To use it is to go against everything we've been taught to believe.

Vanity and the Scourge

The phrase "vulgar magick" probably came about because certain wizards... or, more likely, Technocrats... felt that doing things like flying through the air or throwing fireballs was for common sorcerers, not for refined gentlefolk such as themselves. In time, though, the term merged with another, older phrase: *vain magick*. This was magick that strutted its stuff and hawked loogies in God's face. A vain mage was considered someone who felt that his power trumped the Divine Order... and who therefore needed to be punished.

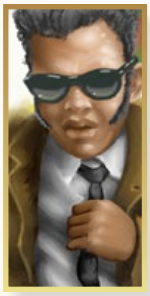
Back then, reality lashed back at vain magick with something called the *Scourge*. Like Paradox, this mystic whip beat a mage for presuming to be better than everyone else; every so often, though, the Scourge actually *rewarded* pride. It's almost as if the Powers That Be were saying, *Hey, kid, good job! You shouldn't have done that, but I like a mage with guts*. The Scourge could hurt you, but it could help you too, and you never knew quite knew which way things would go until the whip came down.

These days, that punishment comes from Paradox, and it's unequivocally harsh. A mage who uses vulgar magick invokes the Paradox Effect, and whether or not it punishes her immediately, she'll suffer for it sooner or later. Does this pain descend from moral judgments on high or simply from tears in her energetic Pattern that come from straining against reality? As usual, that depends on who you ask. Either way, the result's the same. Sooner or later, vulgar magick leads to harm... so most mages avoid using it unless they absolutely *must*.

Which leads to another paradox: to be what we are, we must sometimes go against the flow. A mage exists to dare. Defying Paradox is what we *do*; if we never do so, we deny our potential for change. And so, using magick is a calculated risk. Coincidental magick demands cleverness and skill, vulgar magick demands nerve and a willingness to face the consequences of your actions, and both approaches are essential to doing what we do and being who we are.

No one ever said that being a mage was easy. But without people who are willing to risk *everything*, nothing worthwhile is ever done.

Nine Spheres and the Language of Reality



Okay – so how do we *do* this magick thing? By learning to use the *Spheres* –fields of knowledge that focus on nine elements of reality and then show us how to juggle them.

Think of each Sphere as a language. If you understand Correspondence, then you can "talk" to various principles of connection; if you know Life, then you can "have a conversation" with the Patterns and energies that make up organic life. A mage who masters many "languages" can do many things. Each Sphere's potential compounds another Sphere's potential; the more Spheres you understand, and the better you understand them, the more potential you command.

The Mystic Spheres

Sphere means "to encompass." That's what the Spheres do – they encompass certain elements of reality. By doing so, they also present a baseline model for the hundreds, if not

thousands, of magickal practices on Earth. You could talk to a Siberian shaman, an Egyptian alchemist, a Polynesian kahuna, and a Brazilian Catholic priest, and you'd get four very different explanations about how they do what they do. They probably won't talk about "spheres," and they often won't know what you meant by that term. In the end, however, you'd still come down to the same nine basic principles they all use in some way:

- ***Correspondence*** – the element of connection between apparently separated things.
- ***Entropy*** – the principle of chance, fate, and mortality.
- ***Forces*** – the understanding of elemental energies.
- ***Life*** – keys to the mysteries of life and death.
- ***Matter*** – the principles behind supposedly inanimate objects.
- ***Mind*** – exploration of the potentials of consciousness.
- ***Prime*** – an understanding of the Primal Energy within all things.
- ***Spirit*** – comprehension of Otherworldly forces and inhabitants.
- ***Time*** – the strange workings of chronological forces and perceptions.

The Technocratic Spheres

As I've mentioned earlier, Technocratic mages do not believe that what they do is magick. To members of the Technocratic Union – and even to members of the Traditions who insist that magick is simply science that's not yet commonly understood – the Spheres are not mystic concepts but defined paradigms of Enlightened Science. As with the mystics I described a moment ago, the various technicians and scientists who practice this advanced level of understanding tend to define their understanding with mouthfuls of Greek, Latin, acronyms, and formulae. When you boil all of that down, however, you're still left with nine spheres of influence (not a capitalized term, by the way) that reflect fields of specialized knowledge:

- ***Correspondence Principles*** – the physics of single-point space.
- ***Dimensional Science*** – practical applications of quantum vibration frequencies.
- ***Entropic State Control*** – manipulation of probabilities tending toward entropic results.
- ***Force-Based Paraphysics*** – advanced study of elemental physics.
- ***Life Sciences*** – the governing aspects of biological life forms.
- ***Material Sciences*** – unified study of inert material states.
- ***Primal Utility Theory*** – exploration and application of unified field energies and the human connection to them.
- ***Psychodynamics*** – analysis and manipulation of sentient consciousness.
- ***Temporal Science*** – research and application of chronological field patterns.
- Some Information Age technomancers also refer to the ***Data Sphere***: the principle of connection through quantified information. Whether or not this principle is part of the Correspondence Principles or is its own field entirely depends upon who you ask. It's worth noting, though, that these Datasphere Principles are also used by certain technomancers who do not belong to the Technocracy. According to the Virtual Adepts, a group within the Nine Traditions, they came up with the Data Sphere, and the Technocracy adopted it from them.

Many groups don't *ever* refer to magick in terms of spheres. They'll say they draw upon their connection to gods or spirits or the earth or their inner selves, not upon some sort of generalized principles of Life or Time. Regardless of the names they use, however, all mages employ similar principles when we manipulate reality. The *names* aren't nearly as important as the *effects*.

A Tenth Sphere?

According to certain authorities, there's a Tenth Sphere too. The idea has a certain symmetry to it, after all, and – like dark matter in quantum physics – it's thought to exist simply because there appears to be a place for it in the space between the other elements.

Some folks call this theoretical Sphere *Unity*, *Balance*, *Unified Field Theory*, or even *Ascension*. By understanding it, they say, you can go beyond the limitation of the other nine Spheres and open the door to Ultimate Reality. So far, though, if anyone actually *has* discovered and mastered this Tenth Sphere, they're either not sharing their insights about it or they've transcended this Earthly mudball and taken the secret with them. Right now, so far as I'm aware, the Tenth Sphere – like Ascension itself – is an abstract goal of attainment, not something that people achieve and then hang around to talk about afterward.

The Affinity Sphere

Regardless of how you define what you do, there's one Sphere that inevitably means more to you than any other one: the *affinity Sphere*, your initial field of study and connection. This reflects your "first kiss" within the world of possibilities. Maybe, as a kid, you felt obsessed about the mysteries of biological life; your affinity Sphere would be Life, because life became your original link to a greater reality. Perhaps you gambled or otherwise threw

yourself on the mercies of Lady Luck; your affinity Sphere would be Entropy, your "first love" among mystic principles. A mage whose inquires begin with candles or weather patterns would find an affinity for Forces, and one with an innate sense that "time keeps on slippin'" would gravitate toward Time.

The affinity often manifests during the Awakening, perhaps through a display of wild talent connected to that Sphere; a girl whose Avatar Awakens during a house fire – perhaps by causing that fire – would most likely find herself affiliated with Forces, whereas one whose Awakening saved her from drowning might feel closest to the principles of the Life Sphere. There's no hard-and-fast rule about such things, but as the saying goes, "like follows like." A person with some strong connection to a certain aspect of Creation will often find and nurture an affinity Sphere.

That same idea holds true for groups as well as individuals. Various mystic and Technocratic factions align themselves with certain principles based on their affinity for a given Sphere, and although those groups do not insist that all of their initiates share the same affinity Sphere, each group values certain ideals and teachings based around their most cherished principles. The Verbenae, for example, explore the carnal Arts of Life, and the New World Order delves into the possibilities of one's Mind. Ecstatic mages may be the only ones unmoored enough to truly understand Time, and Templars marshal the Forces at their God's command. If you'd like to understand a group, look at the sorts of magick it prefers. By studying someone else's affinity Sphere, you can learn plenty about the things they revere and respect.

Juggling the Spheres

Each Sphere, in itself, features an array of possibilities. The real magick, though, comes when you start bringing Spheres together. By bringing elements of reality together in creative and often unpredictable ways, a mage unleashes remarkable effects. A bit of Prime, a bit of Matter, and a fair understanding of Life installs cybernetic devices and allows them to function; a blend of Forces and Prime conjures fire, wind, and light. With Correspondence alone, a skilled mage can step from one place to another without passing through the intervening space; add Time, and she can see past events in a distant place as well; add Forces, and she could project the images she sees upon a wall; use Matter and Correspondence instead, and she could open a door in one place, open another door in the next, and step between two doors that had not existed – and could not have existed – until that moment. That's the *true* power of the Spheres. With a nuanced understanding of their principles and a broad understanding of different Spheres, you can do almost anything Reality will let you get away with doing.

Such great knowledge, of course, is easier to achieve in theory than in practice. It takes years, often decades, sometimes *centuries*, to master the variety of Spheres, stretch their possibilities, and learn how to use them to their full potential without blowing yourself to atoms in the process. Very few mages of *any* faction achieve such proficiency. More often, a willworker finds a few fields of expertise, builds her studies and experience around them, and eventually masters a limited yet impressive range of magicks. There's enough potential within each Sphere that a single mage could spend a lifetime or two simply learning what that one aspect of reality can do.

The Cycle of Effect: Conception, Form, Perception, and Decay

All Spheres are, of course, interconnected, their properties cycling through a circle of connections that unite the principles while keeping each individual field a specialized unit of study and effect. In plain English, one thing leads to another, with all of them playing a part in the greater scheme of things.

This cycle creates things out of apparent nothingness – from

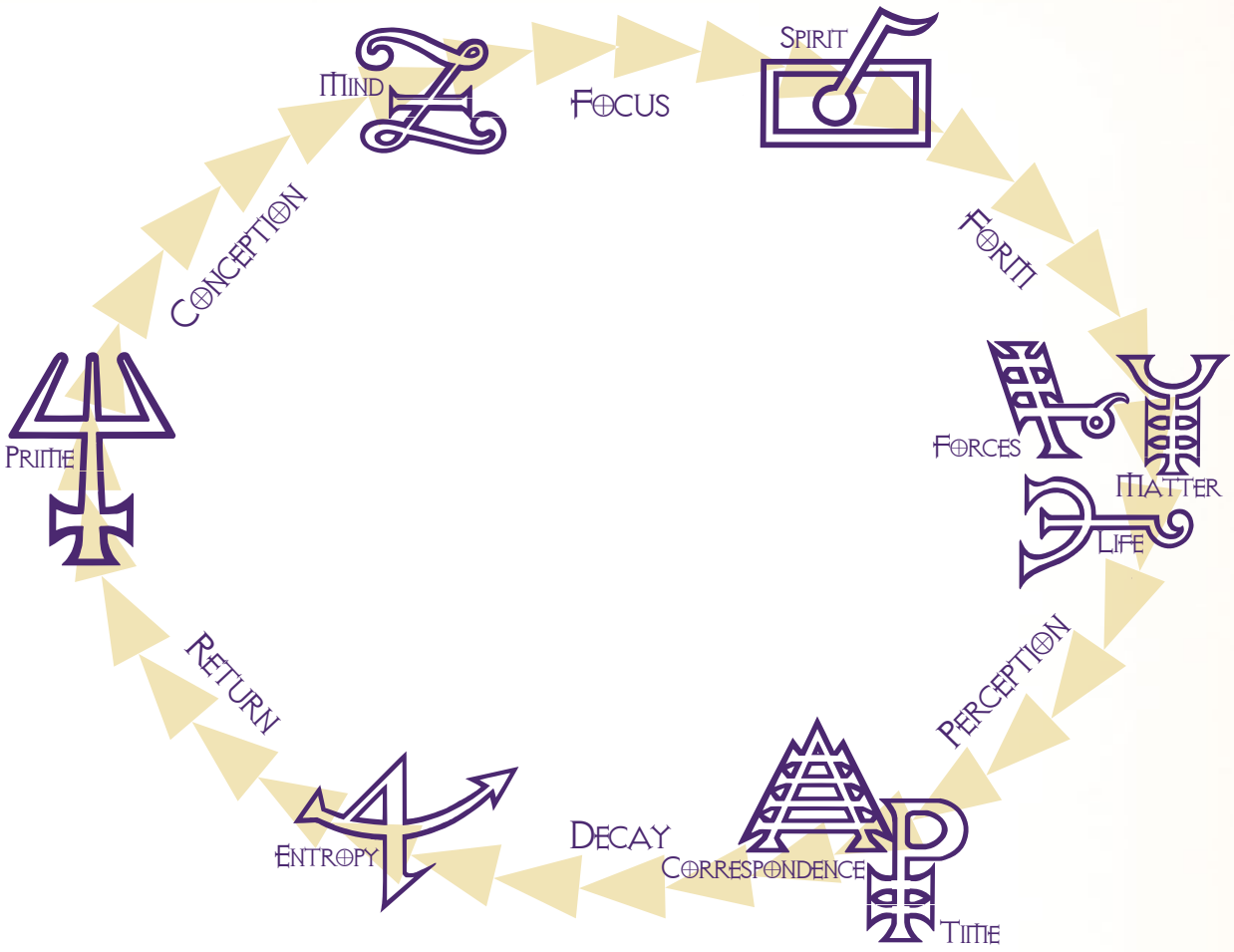
Technocratic Spheres in Play

When you're describing the game system Effects of a Technocratic character, the usual nine Sphere names are totally appropriate. There's not enough room on a character sheet to list Sphere names like Primal Utility Theory, and using such terms to refer to the rules can get confusing in the middle of a game.

Technocratic *characters*, however, will *never* talk about doing "Mind magick." That concept runs totally counter to their belief system. They practice the scientific disciplines of Psychodynamics, and don't you forget it! When you're playing such characters, a stream of reasonable-sounding pseudoscientific gobbledygook – much like the terminology you might use for an Etherite or Virtual Adept – conveys a vibrant sense of setting and mood.

One of the satirical elements of **Mage** involves the fact that everyone's doing the same thing but almost no one will admit as much. The fact that all mages use some variation on the same nine Spheres is an intentional reflection of that satire. Don't get too wrapped up, then, in the differences between Dimensional Science and the Spirit Sphere; those differences might mean *everything* to the characters who use them, but – beyond roleplaying choices and focus-based limitations – they make no difference in terms of the game systems that determine what those characters can do.

For details about the Technocratic Spheres, see the *optional rules* regarding the ***Data***, ***Dimensional Science***, and ***Primal Utility*** Spheres in **Chapter Ten**. And for more about the use of technological explanations for magickal Effects, see the sidebar ***SCIENCE!!!*** in **Chapter Six**, **(p. 290)**.



the initial *conception* of an idea, to its *form*, to the *perception* of its form, to the *decay* of that form so that the idea, its materials, and its essence can return to the first point of the cycle and begin all over again in some new state.

Each step of that cycle involves a series of Spheres. From original conception in the energy field of *Prime*, an effect gets focused through consciousness in the *Mind* and attains substance through the *Spirit*. Given form in Patterns of *Forces*, *Life*, or *Matter*, the substance interacts with other Patterns through *Correspondence* and *Time*. Finally, it breaks down through *Entropy*, its elements dispersed back to the Prime to start all over again. If there *is* a Tenth Sphere, it probably governs the entire process, like a circle that encloses this cycle, keeping it all whole and functioning.

Thankfully, you don't need every single Sphere in order to bring things into being. Generally, that just takes Prime and some other combination of Forces, Matter, Life, and perhaps Mind. Correspondence, Time, and Entropy tend to take care of themselves unless a mage speeds them along or alters their natural flow.

As for Spirit – which, of course, certain mages don't even believe *exists* – it's apparently a natural process too. Masters of Spirit, however, insist that the soul – the spiritual essence – of a being or thing depends a great deal upon the energy invested in it. If you really believe in something or someone, it tends to acquire a certain degree of spiritual energy from that belief. That's how Tinkerbell can rally when children clap their hands and cry "*I DO believe in fairies!*" Their actions, it's been said, generate spiritual energies that invigorate the fairy in question. It's not that easy in real life, of course – otherwise, we'd be up to our ears in pixies, horses, fishes, and money. Still, the principle is supposedly true, if a tad exaggerated for effect.

What this means, again, is that belief is a *very* powerful thing – far more powerful than most people give it credit for being. As a mage, you'll probably find yourself face-to-face with the products of other people's beliefs, or your own, quite often... and that's not always a happy thing at all.

A Brief Overview of the Spheres and Their Properties

So what *are* these Spheres, and what can they do? That's another one those things that mages can wax poetic about for months on end. The basic principles involved, however, can be summed up more or less like this:

Levels of Sphere Progress and Expertise

When a mage begins working with a particular Sphere, her abilities follow a general progression of expertise. The more she understands that Sphere, the more she can do with it.

The levels of Sphere expertise feature five advancing steps:

- **Perception (in game terms, Sphere Rank 1):** An initiate grasps the essential principles and begins to perceive the ways in which that Sphere behaves. A Correspondence initiate learns to spot connections and reckon distances; a Forces initiate notes elemental phenomena; and a Time initiate achieves an uncanny sense of the ebbs and flows of time. The mage can't alter anything just yet, but she can put her observations to good use.
- **Manipulation (Sphere Rank 2):** The mage begins to use the Sphere to make small alterations in her local reality. The Correspondence student can look across distances or pull small objects from "nowhere"; the Forces student can make burning candles flare or go out; and the Time student gains limited pre- and postcognition. Although not yet able to perform dramatic Effects, the mage gains a small degree of control over the Sphere's principles... but for many tasks, a small degree of control is all you need.
- **Control (Sphere Rank 3):** Achieving a greater level of accomplishment, the mage can make notable changes to elements connected with the Sphere. Our Correspondence devotee can step through intervening space; the Forces devotee could conjure winds or make fire leap; the Time devotee might speed up or slow down her speed relative to her surroundings. Remarkable feats become possible, and the mage approaches the realm of true wizardry.
- **Command (Sphere Rank 4):** An impressive command of the Sphere in question allows the mage to perform dramatic feats. The Correspondence adept might appear in several places at once, the Forces adept conjures storms, and the Time adept can literally stop time in her vicinity. Even when such Effects aren't obviously magick, the mage attains significant influence over the principles associated with that Sphere.
- **Mastery (Sphere Rank 5):** Magnificent feats become possible with such dominion within the Sphere. Our Correspondence master can stack several places into a single location; the Forces master commands vast phenomena – firestorms, blizzards, even nuclear blasts; the Time master can step outside of time, achieve limited immortality, or travel back and forth through time. Literally godlike miracles greet the master of a Sphere, and Reality literally shapes itself to her whim.

Rumor has it that levels of **Archmastery** exist for each Sphere, granting abstract powers that even gods might envy. In game terms, these would be the *EXTREMELY optional* Sphere Ranks 6-10. Such powers are beyond almost every mage alive, take centuries to attain, and turn chronicles into blasted wreckage. Groups that want to bring such powers into play can find them in the sourcebook **Masters of the Art**. We cannot, however, overemphasize the destructive potential of these, again, *OPTIONAL* Sphere Ranks. Though technically canon, they should be avoided for all but the most outlandish **Mage** chronicles.

For more details about the Spheres and their powers, see **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 511-527)**.

Correspondence: The Principle of Connection

Everything's connected in some way. Despite centuries of what's been called *discrete phenomenon perception* – that is, the idea that we're all separate objects and entities that occasionally cross paths – both physics and metaphysics remind us that all things are intrinsically interconnected. Your actions affect me, my actions affect the dog next door, a butterfly flaps his wings and stirs up the proverbial hurricane... that basic idea. Those connections aren't immediately apparent, of course. If we saw all of the connections between us, we'd probably go insane. It's no wonder, then, that masters of Correspondence – the Sphere originally called *Connection* – often seem pretty weird. They perceive unity where the rest of us see division.

Correspondence is the anti-Ayn Rand principle. When you understand this Sphere, you start to recognize connections between places, people, and things, ultimately realizing that the idea of "places, people, and things" is all an illusion anyway. A Master of this Sphere can step across distances, reach into one place and take something into another, and see into areas that appear to be far away unless you understand that *all* places are actually *one single* place. Like Papa Legba or the trickster god Hermes, a mage who deeply understands Correspondence transcends the idea of separation. He sees doorways where no one else notices them, learns to open them, and eventually *becomes* them.

Entropy: Fate, Fortune, and Decay

Change is an innate law of the universe. If things stopped changing, everything would freeze into eternal stasis. Even then, though, such stasis is an illusion; sooner or later, that frozen state begins to decay. The Entropy Sphere, then, works with the forces of change and decay, speeding or slowing the effects of mortality.

Entropy throws open the box that holds Schrödinger's cat. Its principles guide probability, inevitability, and the results of both. Masters of Entropy – who often seem morbid,

fatalistic, or terribly cheerful – can force the hand of Chance, boost or destroy someone's luck, degrade substances, and even destroy thoughts. Entropic mages tend to follow either order or chaos; devotees of order examine patterns and look for ways to reinforce them, whereas students of chaos look for ways to break down those same patterns and guide their energies toward a new beginning. Like the Fates who are often associated with this Sphere, mages pursuing Entropy pick up the threads of Creation, work with them, and eventually cut them off.

Forces: The Principles of Elemental Might

Earth. Air. Fire. Water. Long before the Periodic Table of elements existed, mages realized that the natural elements held power of their own. How could they *not?* Even now, when we live in houses more stable and climate-controlled than anything else in history (and for that, incidentally, you can thank the Technocracy), the power of a hurricane or firestorm can turn security to ruins. And so, of course, when our forebears turned their minds and powers toward control, the first place they looked for inspiration was probably the elements.

Forces is the Sphere of elemental energies. Although Matter deals primarily in the products of Earth and Water, and Spirit and Prime deal with the Fifth Essence (which is either Spirit or Quintessence, depending on who you ask), the Forces Sphere allows a mage to understand, influence, and eventually command the powers of Air and Fire. Beyond that, this Sphere also grants power over the invisible Forces that drive all earthly elements: gravity, momentum, light, darkness, and even – at its highest levels – the titanic power of the atom. And because of all that, masters of this Sphere command the most devastating energies on Earth.

"Forces" is an appropriate name for this Sphere. Its masters and manifestations are pretty damned forceful. Given the immense powers within their reach, it's no wonder that Hermetic wizards, Taftáni weavers, and Technocratic troopers seem both arrogant and confident. In the realm of Zeus, you live and die by lightning's hand. To wield this Sphere, you've got to be proud enough to throw your weight around, yet disciplined enough to know where – and where *not* – to hurl it.

Life: Understanding the Living Form

The frighteningly intimate Sphere of Life is not an Art for weak stomachs or squeamish minds. This visceral discipline celebrates the messy splendors of organic life. Beneath our skins and furs and scales, we're all pulp and bones and vile fluids. The mage who understands Life accepts our frailties and learns how to heal them, exploit them, and twist them into interesting shapes. And to do that, you've got to get your hands very, *very* dirty.

The rawest and most carnal Art, Life requires both passion and *com*passion. Its masters are simultaneously the most loving and the most ruthless mages you're ever likely to meet. These folks can change shapes, heal wounds, cure sickness, rend limbs, turn people into toads, grow trees with a glance, and turn enemies into writhing protoplasm. This is the Sphere of Kali, the Dark Mother who celebrates sex and carnage in her dance, or Aphrodite, whose favors hold the cruel beauty of Life itself.

Matter: Mastery of Inert Substances

Whereas Forces deals with ephemeral elements, Matter deals with things you can hold in your hands. The elemental principles of Earth, Water, and – in the Asian sense – Metal are the dominion of this Sphere and its adepts. Things that bend, break, hold firm, or give way retain solid Patterns... or maintain at least an *illusion* of solidity... in the Earthly realm, so this Art depends upon taking them apart, strengthening them, or transmuting them into something else.

(An important note: certain substances, like wood or cotton, are governed by the Life Sphere while they're alive and governed by the Matter Sphere when life has fled. Bones, flesh, fur, and so on pass from Life into Matter when their animating energies are gone. As a result, certain substances that are both alive *and* dead – most notably, the uncanny forms of vampires – are governed by *both* Spheres together. Neither Life nor Matter can affect them alone, because they belong to the realms of both at once.)

Matter is, in many respects, an associative Art. Mages often combine it with other Spheres to create greater effects. Prime combined with Matter weaves objects out of apparent nothingness; Time combined with Matter takes objects out of the normal time stream; Entropy combined with Matter causes things to erode; Spirit and Matter shift those things to spiritual ephemera. Although it's a potent Sphere in its own right, Matter works best when its properties blend with those of other Spheres.

Matter specialists tend to be what you might call crafty, working with their hands, often gauging, tinkering, or deconstructing objects for the sake of further knowledge. Most, if not all, of these mages master arts like carpentry and stonework, and each one of them can hold forth for hours about metallic properties or different grains of wood. Like Daedalus, the godlike inventor from whom early Technocrats took their name, Matter is ingenious yet dependable. Behind apparent inflexibility, they'll often surprise you, because experts in this field understand how mutable so-called solid materials can be.

Mind: Exploration of Consciousness

"It's all in your head." How often have you heard that particular dismissal? And yet, as Mind adepts will tell you, *everything in existence* is "all in our heads." Each thought, each sensation, every emotional realization or abstract perception manifests through electrical impulses in the brain that get processed by consciousness. That consciousness is the playground of the Mind Sphere, and its experts can turn everything you thought you knew about reality inside out.

Certain Mind-mages see consciousness as an untouchable abstraction; others view the brain as a complex computer, to be programmed and downloaded at will. Both schools of thought appear to hold some vision of the truth. Consciousness clearly reaches beyond mere physicality, and yet it's chained – at least for most folks – to our physical forms. In time, a Mind master learns how to uncouple his mental process from his physical state and then project his mind off on astral journeys. Even then, however, a hard blow to the head can scramble his brain and throw his mental mastery out the nearest window.

Mind is one of the fuzzier Spheres – more of an art than a science. Where Matter, Life, and Forces deal with things you can touch and measure, Mind reaches into abstract fields. Thoughts, feelings, impressions, identity – these are the tools and toys of mental magicks. And so, if Mind adepts seem somewhat... *heady* at times, there are good reasons for their "thought-full" state. Like Odin One-Eye, the trickster seer, such mages scan the horizon, sending out Thought and Memory as their guides.

Prime: Exploration of Quintessential Energies

As I mentioned earlier, there's a Primal Essence that pulses within all things. Whether it's bound up into Patterns or flowing through concepts and potential, this Quintessence forms the basis for our world. Mages who explore the mysteries of Prime understand the ebbs and flows of this sublime essence – the "Blood of the Dragon" and the seminal fluid of the gods.

Prime Arts study energies and forms, spotting traces of Quintessence in or between each Pattern and then channeling them to suit the purpose of a mage. Masters of this Sphere can follow Quintessential flows, taste the Resonance of certain energies, shift those energies in or out of Patterns, and thus bring things into being or drain them of the power to be real. Most willworkers know the basics of this Sphere, but very few manage to master it. Prime's a slippery Art, easily obscured by esoterica.

As students of the Primal Utility Theory can tell you, Prime energies tend to ebb and flow around living things... most especially around *people*. When human beings invest themselves, emotionally and intellectually, in something, that something tends to gather Prime energies. Your favorite shirt has more Prime energy than one just purchased off the rack at a store because you have put more of yourself into that Pattern and its energies. Thus, certain students of the Prime principles view their magick in terms of strange math and hypereconomics, calculating the sublime energies involved in transactions between living and unliving things. By tracing those connections, they believe, you can manipulate those energies as well.

Like the energy for which it's named, the Prime Sphere is sublime, transcending firm analysis or concrete definitions. Its adepts speak in riddles and metaphors, often blazing with charisma and robust health. Yet despite their bright personas, they have quicksilver personalities. Prime is the milk of Kuan Yin, the spit of Jesus, the blood of Tiamat – an essence both rarified and vulgar, whose properties energize all things.

Spirit: Accord with Spiritual Essence and Emanations

Despite materialistic preconceptions, any mage – even a Technocratic one – understands that matter is just part of Creation's Tapestry. Beyond the physical mass of Matter, the consciousness of Mind, and the energies of Forces and Prime, there's the ephemeral quality of Spirit: an element distilled from – or perhaps the originating source of – those other components. In some schools of occult thought, Spirit is the fifth element, the rarified soul-stuff of the Universe at large. To other outlooks, Spirit is the core of every living thing, the Resonance of life, or the alternate dimensions to the Earthly plane. All perspectives agree on this much: Spirit transcends the physical elements, yet it has a consciousness all its own.

One of the earliest magickal pursuits, the Spirit Sphere encompasses the Otherworlds, Umbral entities, and the principles of the human soul. Like Mind, it's impossible to quantify with precise measurements. The word *spirit* comes from the Latin term for breathing, so certain mages call this Art "the Breath of the World." This is the primal Art of the shaman and the priest, the bridge between what we feel with our hands and what we feel with our souls.

(Dimensional Science specialists have a somewhat more scientific approach to this weird Sphere. Even then, though, they often admit that many things remain beyond the reach of science... for the moment, anyway.)

Spiritual mages have an otherworldly air about them – sometimes spacey, often serene, frequently capricious, and occasionally cruel. They tend to get impatient with the importance that folks place upon material things. Spirit magicks echo with the cackle of Coyote and the throaty laugh of Baron Samedi – a mockery of the so-called real world and its denial of infinity.

Time: The Perception of Chronological Flow

The most confounding Art of all, Time skirts the strange domain of Chronos, titan of eternity. The Ecstatic Tradition once named itself after that legendary titan, and few other mages understand Time's principles as well as the Ecstatics do. More abstract than Mind, more ephemeral than Spirit, this Art dizzies anyone who tries to understand it. Mages who manage to unravel Time's mysteries can look forward or backward, slow or speed time's momentum, or even step outside the passing minutes, hours, and years of our lives.

Like Correspondence, the Time Sphere confounds rational analysis. Its principles go against everything you've been taught to believe. Perhaps the human mind *needs* drugs in order to accommodate such levels of temporal dislocation. We all get those feelings that "this has happened before" or "this seems to take *foreverrrr*..." Only a Time mage, though, can truly comprehend the fluid nature of time and turn it to her advantage.

Like running water, time has currents, tides, and undertows. Going *with* its flow is far easier than going *against* it. Mages who work with time understand that turning back the clock is incredibly difficult, even for masters of this Sphere. If you think of time like a strong tide – pushing against you with unfathomable force, splashing you when you struggle to push back – then you'll understand why certain feats, like time-travel, are vulgar as far as the Consensus is concerned.

Time masters tend to be either dreamily distracted or fanatically precise. They can be punctual within a split second, answer questions you haven't asked yet, and speak in an eternal present tense. There's no past, present, or future to the masters of Time. In the words of Janis Joplin, "It's all the same fucking *day*, man"... a day they can stretch or compress at will.

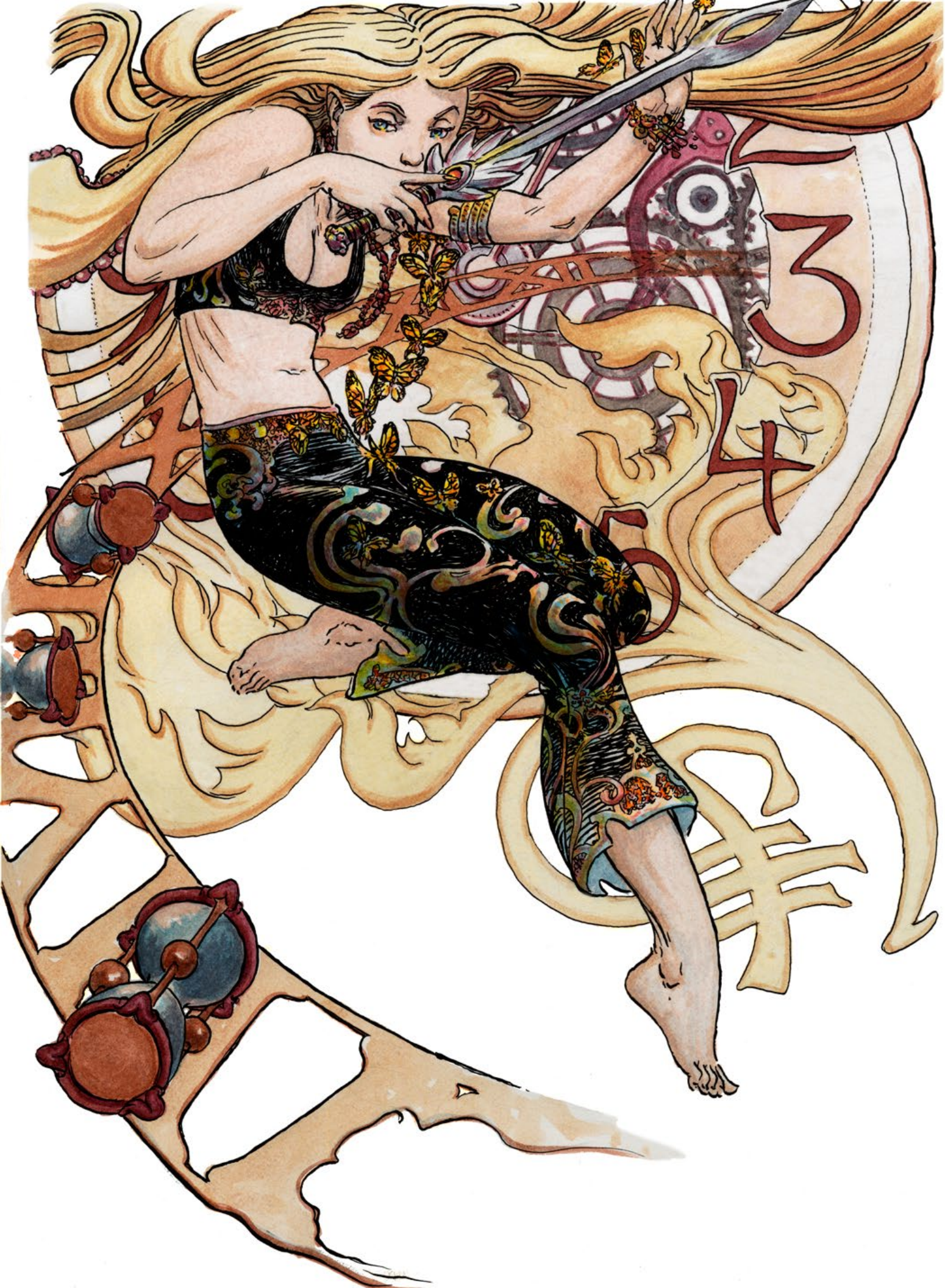
Whether you view the Spheres with a Tradition's respect, a Technocratic analysis, or some other cultural outlook, these nine principles give you a metaphysical toolkit. Combined with Awakened awareness, focused belief, and dedicated willpower, the Spheres turn the keys in Reality's doorway and invite you in to have a look around. For those of us who understand their ways, there is no truer form of magick. Lesser sorcerers and Night-Folk have their own powers, true enough. None of them, though, can do the things we do.

Do, or Do Not

Which brings me back to my opening again. Magick is a verb. You *do* it, you *will* it, you make things *happen*. Despite the old view of mages as doddering mystic weirdoes, we are dynamic forces in our world. Whichever tools she uses, whichever beliefs he accepts, whichever ends they pursue with the forces at their command, mages *DO* things. Our Arts are our actions, whatever role we play.

And so, when you get beyond the esoterica, magick's core is simple: *Learn*. *Know*. *Will*. And *do*. Be proud but not careless, creative but not undisciplined. Understand that actions have consequences, and be ready to risk everything for what you know to be a greater goal. Whatever you do, bring such pride and artistry to your accomplishments that the gods themselves will sing your praises when the game is done.

"*Get off thy ass shall be the whole of the Law*."



Chapter Three: The Shadow World

Meanwhile, behind the façade of this innocent-looking bookstore...
– Batman TV series, *"Zelda the Great"*

The Tower

Associations: *Broken defenses; shattering; disruption; a bolt of insight; freedom from ignorance; futility in the face of nature; housecleaning...*

They're at it again.

It's 3:14 am, and our upstairs neighbors are having another round of Brawl in the Family – a fun game everyone in the building can share… or at least the ones unfortunate enough to live right underneath your bedroom. Some boomy-doom music has been rattling through the floor for hours, but I could at least manage to sort of sleep through that. Now that the screams and curses and smashing-furniture crap has started up again, though, there's no way a person with a conscience… or a pair of functioning eardrums… could sleep through it.

And so, after a few minutes of "GODDAMMIT!" this and "FUCKING HELL!" that muffling through what's left of my ceiling, I take a deep breath, sit up, and weigh my options.

Cops might not arrive for ages, if at all, which means I get to listen to this shit for an hour or more. Again. And I have to work in the morning, even if no one else in this goddamned building does.

I could roll up some toilet paper earplugs, jam 'em in my ears, and ride it out until maybe I fall back asleep. That could take a while.

Or I could go upstairs, confront those assholes, remind them that not everyone in the building wants to listen to their domestic carnage, and hope they're not so drunk and violent that they decide to include me in the game.

I could do something… drastic, too. My altar shines in the half-light through my window blinds. The battered top hat and gnarled crutch catch my eye. What'cha gonna do? they ask me. For the life of me, I don't have a good answer.

Wow. All those options suck.

And then I see the stain.

It starts out as a shadow across the crack in the ceiling. Then it spreads.

Then a drop of it falls.

Lands on my more-or-less-clean sheets.

I don't have to see the color to know what it is.

A second drop falls.

Then a third.

Another deep sigh.

Reach for my top hat.

Grab the cane.

So much for work.

By morning, I'll have to move again…

A Stroll in the Park

Let's take a walk. It won't be far – just the length and breadth of infinity.

Perhaps the hardest thing to wrap your head around in this crazy world of ours is the sheer scope of it. In the comfort of the average American living room, there's no real hint of the strangeness outside your windows. So let's take a stroll in the park, where familiarity meets potential and then heads off in directions you might never have considered before. Some parts of this journey may feel strange, others oddly familiar. I won't belabor the obvious Shakespeare quote, but let's allow our philosophies to dream a little bigger than they might have otherwise.

A fact to keep in mind along this tour: what *you* see is not necessarily what *I* see, and neither one of us might see things as another person would. Certain things are more stable and reliable than others, but here's a term to keep in mind: *subjective reality*. What this means is that we all experience reality differently. Many elements remain constant, but the details shift from person to person… sometimes with radically different results.

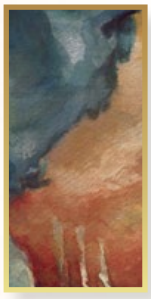
The Rashomon Effect

How can that happen? I call it *the Rashomon effect*, after the famous Japanese film and stage play of that name. *Rashomon* tells the story of a crime; the audience witnesses it from several different perspectives. All those stories seem equally true… which is the point. For each different person telling the story, the facts appear differently. And that's the way reality works. You and I might share a walk in the park, but the way we experience it will depend a lot on what we expect to see while we do.

Any mage, regardless of faction, soon realizes that what mundane people refer to as "reality" is flexible. A few constants, but lots of wiggle room. That wiggle room is where we live most of our lives after the Awakening… and the more enlightened or powerful we become, the more flexible our world reveals itself to be. A newly-Awakened person realizes that she can see the structure of a stone; a mage with training and experience learns to perceive and alter energies within the stone; the master can turn that stone to fog; and beyond mastery she realizes that stone and fog are both illusions to be transformed or ignored at will.

And so, yes – the tour we're about to take has different names, sensations, and levels of reality. For now, we'll focus on the basics, but in time you'll realize – assuming you live that long – that *all* of this is just an illusion… what's often called *maya*, the Earthly dream from which most folks never Awaken.

A Nightmare World



For many people in our darkened world, that dream is a nightmare. Rats breed while children starve. The rich have more money than God, and the poor pray to get through another day with food on the table and a roof over their heads. Lots of people don't have even *that* much. Cruel laws and social indifference have packed the streets with lost and homeless souls. Ayn Rand's philosophy of parasitic prosperity reached its full poisonous bloom in this world. Pundits and politicians tear nations apart for monetary gain. Sure, we have our saints as well as our sinners, but all too often they become martyrs, monsters, or both. The kindly priest gropes boys in the silence of a rectory; girls sell virginity on the Internet, disappearing in the night as predators take their fill. There *is* wonder here, but it's a shadow-sort of wonder – the gleam of raindrops on a spider's web.

Here's our park – a patch of grass and trees stuck between steel-glass towers whose lights dim the stars. Handfuls of gargoyles and dead-hero statues rise up here and there, desecrated with bird shit and graffiti. Furtive people dart between the shadows,

seeking drugs and forbidden encounters. The grass gleams with discarded needles and broken glass. Gang tags blaze across the old stone walls. Here and there, occult designs hint at more sinister things. Carved names glow against the tree bark; cigarette embers shine against the dark. Lumpy shapes scatter across the field; sleeping people? Corpses? Probably both. A full moon shines through smoggy clouds. Stars struggle to be seen. The closer light, however, comes from the wash of windows and car headlights cutting through the dark. Broken streetlamps leave patches of gloom. Odd figures loiter on the edge of sight. Someone's crying in that alley, but it's best not to find out why. Every morning, the city's clean-up crews sort the living from the dead.

On the fringes of those cities, suburbia sprawls. Peppered with strip malls, strip clubs, McMansions, McTown Halls, fast food franchises, mini-screened multiplexes, housing developments, gated communities, and more gun shops, pawn shops, and sex-toy shops than you'd ever think were possible, this clapboard wasteland is as slick and rotten as the American Dream. By the light of reality TV, parents beat their kids, cheat on their spouses, and drink or drug themselves insensible. Gangs creep through the streets at night, rendering every park and playground into a bad joke. Schools, decades old, crumble due to lack of funds. Church marquees broadcast pious slogans to the endless cars and empty cul-de-sacs.

It goes on like this across the continents: cities that are too big, too old, or both; suburbs that promise everything and give almost nothing; wilderness where the borders of so-called civilization collapse and ancient secrets defy man's dominion. Empty ghost towns; factories staffed with child labor; war zones and polluted smears. Is it any wonder, then, that folks spend more time with TVs than with the world around them? When you step outside your ring of safety, it's a pretty scary world.

Poisonous Utopia

Although the foretold Apocalypse has yet to show its face, that's not for lack of trying on our part. The last decade or so has seen perpetual upheaval, innovation, and revolt. Surging through the second decade of this brave new millennium, we seem more poised than ever before on a precipice of our own design. Not long ago, people expected divine revelation – waking gods, rains of fire, that sort of thing. Now, though, it appears that revelation comes through the mirrors we hold up to our faces... and that reflection is both fascinating and awful beyond words.

Slapped in the face on September 11, 2001, the American giant became a Frankenstein monster. We rained Armageddon on the guilty and innocent alike. Riding high on a swell of nationalistic fear, we embraced things that should never have been allowed. Torture camps opened. Holy books were burnt. In the name of ancient scriptures, our leaders aimed the greatest military machine in history at our enemies... and then found ourselves hamstrung by our own cultural presumptions. Promises of prosperity got torn down by the realities behind them. Roughly 15 years later, our economy staggers. A few folks eat cake while the rest of us scrabble over crumbs.

Our counterpart fanatics turned industry's toys against us, crafting a global network in which geographic boundaries disappeared. Power tools ripped skin and bone in Allah's name, and the Internet – proud tool of Hermes unbound – became a hall of mirrors that all show a different face. Across four continents, a generation has grown up in the shadow of terror. Thanks to the tools we made to keep us safe, no one truly *is*.

Across the world, prosperity and poverty chase each other's tails. Slave-children make toys for the privileged elite. Governments mortgage their own lands in order to keep their richest people fat. "Revolution" is on everybody's lips. Streets boil with epic protests. Cops with military hardware turn cities into terrorized fiefdoms. Weeping prophets foretell blood in every gutter. The so-called Holy Land burns with insane zeal – and with three religions literally hell-bent on bringing about their Apocalypse, we might still see the visions of that demented scripture played out on the global stage. May *all* the gods help us then... but I wouldn't count on them for deliverance.

Over 10 years back, the Technocracy declared victory. What a joke *that* was!

The irony is that wonderful things *have* happened. That Internet – a toy for the elite 20 years ago – is now an intrinsic part of the world as we know it. Devotees of the Correspondence Sphere were right: in a virtual sense, at least, you really *can* turn all places into one. Social media, cell phones, high-speed wireless connections, and instant videos are at the literal fingertips of people across the globe. You can watch the streets of Istanbul from a laptop in Tokyo and call a friend in Sao Paulo from the phone in your pocket on the Appalachian Trail. We can speak to one another, see one another, *care* about one another in ways that were impossible 20 years ago. This *should* be Utopia.

And instead, it's... well, *not*.

Who needs cannibal gods when you've got human beings? When scared and bored, we devour one another. Social media and a consolidated mass-media machine have turned us into a global box of angry rats, biting our neighbors over each perceived infraction. Terror's profitable, so our media keep us terrified. Every channel, it seems, blares "*SPECIAL REPORT!*" and "*It could happen to YOU!*" in a round-the-clock orgy of orchestrated fear. We can see each abduction, every murder, the daily holocausts we inflict on one another. In our poisonous utopia, we turn miracles to miseries. Every neighbor is a monster, and we all live right next door.

Our gods must be laughing through their tears.

And here's an unpopular truth for you: *we made this world*. It's the reality we've built – all of us. Sleepers and Awakened and the folks in between... we're *all* responsible for this. Mystic mages blame the Technocracy, the Technocrats blame the mystics, and both sides of that divide are right. Folks will tell

you that vampires made this world, that it's corrupted by some cosmic Wyrm, fallen to demonic hands, or trembling in the shadow of God's wrath. All those theories might be true. But the fact is, we *allowed* it to happen. This world is what we make of it. If it's dark, then Darkness must appeal to us.

Thankfully, it's not *all* dark.

Hope and Fear

Beyond the nightclubs where folks go to dance their fear away, outside the churches and the protest camps, you'll find love in strange places and hope in the night. Candle-lit shops and gleaming penthouses, soup kitchens and blessed sanctuaries all draw the people who refuse to be afraid. Those social media glory holes also help find lost kids, send out cries for help, dig up the truths our leaders choose to hide, and reveal that "the other" we've been told to fear looks pretty much like us.

The global rise of technology has given us something else as well: the rise of *extraordinary citizens* whose dynamic worldviews accept broad and inclusive paradigms. The Technocracy likes to claim those people as their own, but the fact is this: people with open minds have a wider range of freedom. Sure, you might spend all day checking your Twitter account, but those tweets could have you thinking all *kinds* of subversive thoughts. Freedom of information undermines tyranny. The source of that information does not dictate what you do with it.

So yes, our world is scary. Yeah, things look kinda bleak. But here's the secret for both mages and the Masses alike: *hope trumps fear when you dare to make it so.*

The tools of the masters have given slaves a voice. Magic's as real as the "preferred reading platform" in your hands. Every life, human and otherwise, has the potential to tip the balance in favor of a better day. It's up to us, then, to go nurture that potential – to strive against the weight of fear.

Now more than ever, the power is ours if we choose to use it well.

Power and Sanctuary

Even in such a world, we find places of safety and security. For unAwakened folks, those sanctuaries might be found in quiet glades, distant mountain peaks, houses of deep faith, or private homes and hospitals where kindness keeps the pain at bay. Compassion isn't always *easy* to find, but it's there if you know where to look and how to recognize it once you're there.

Sanctums

A studio not far from here holds freeform dances every other night. People come from all over the city to spend a little time spinning around the floor among people they can trust. A nearby mission hosts three meals a day, donated by local businesses and individuals whose hearts and bank

Future Fates: The New Millennium

The world has changed a lot since the original **Mage: The Ascension** series, which ran between 1993 and 2003. Significant events and technologies have altered the social and political landscape. Beyond a certain escapade involving some planes and buildings and all the resulting insanities, the world has – as of this writing – experienced a time of new revolutions; a global financial crisis which has yet to be resolved; a surge of climate change and natural disasters; the rise of social media; a massive conflux of wireless, cell phone/ smart phone, online video, digital imaging, body armor, drone weapons, high-speed Internet, and other revolutionary technologies; global controversies about gender and ethnic identities and their associated rights; and an expansion and consolidation of mass media and government surveillance that makes *1984* look like a business plan. These events, and many others, have made the world of our new millennium a different place – for better and worse – than the world into which **Mage** was born.

In the same vein, events that shaped **Mage**'s original setting – the crack wars, grunge/ punk/ Gothic music, the implosion of the Soviet Union, Gulf War I, and that newfangled "home computer" thing, among others – are ancient history now. Doubtless, there'll be people reading these words who weren't even born when the first **Mage** book slid off the presses, and other folks who'll want **Mage** to be exactly the way it was back when they played it during Bill Clinton's heyday. And so, with regards to the many changes our world has seen since 1993, a **Mage** Storyteller has several options:

- **Shit Happened:** 9/11 happened, Hurricane Katrina happened, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars happened, and the world's smack in the middle of global climate change. International revolts, Fox News, the Greek economic crisis, and all the other messes and miracles that define our era are in full swing. **Mage 20** assumes this option, but you don't have to.
- **Some Shit *May Have* Happened:** Maybe 9/11 happened but the Arab Spring did not; perhaps it's the other way around. Maybe YouTube puts the world online, but other things never came to pass. The world's a synthesis of certain real-life events and the lack of others. If you change things, though, just make sure the related things change too – it's hard to have YouTube if the world's still functioning on dial-up connections.
- **Shit Happened *My Way*:** Maybe Iraq really *did* have WMDs. Perhaps the Reckoning described in **Mage Revised** is still in progress and the Earth's in total chaos. It could be that President Maverick won in 2008 or that the world's still watching *Animaniacs* and digging on Pearl Jam and 2 Live Crew. The setting blurs between 1993 and 2013, with the details as you want them.

As the saying goes, reality is up for grabs. Define your **Mage** age as you see fit.

accounts aren't too tight for a little charity. A Pagan coven meets each Wednesday night at a bookstore down the street, and its members have ambitions that go beyond merely shocking the mundanes. And a local millionaire, heiress to a ship-building fortune, spends vast amounts of cash each year to sponsor causes and change lives. For all the selfishness and greed in this world, there are still folks who hold defiant candles against the dark.

Those people often make safe space for themselves and their friends. These places – warded by mystic, spiritual, or oddly scientific technologies – provide *Sanctums* for folks in need of protection and rest. You might find dozens of them throughout any city or town on earth: the witch's herb garden, the mad scientist's garage workshop, the martial artist's dojo, the artist's studio. There's nothing overly magical about such places – they're simply comforting work or worship spaces, crafted to support the people who use them. Sometimes, however, the things that go on there are magickal by definition – events, rites, and experiments whose effects should be impossible and yet clearly are *not*.

Chantries, Constructs, Labyrinths, and More

And then there are places where the dominant reality has been banished – places where "magick" is more than just a word. If you know the right passwords and attract the right friends, they might take you to that house down the block where the inside's bigger than the outside would suggest. Each room has a fireplace that never runs out of wood. Certain doors there don't go where you'd expect such doors to lead: the back door leads to a field in Ireland; a closet on the fourth floor (a floor that *shouldn't* exist, yet *does*) opens into a luxurious meditation room, lit by votive candles that never burn out. The three dogs who live there are extremely intelligent; you'd swear one of them could talk if you asked her a serious question... and you'd be right to think so, too. This house, and others like it, is called a *Chantry*: a house where magick, and those who use it, can be relatively safe.

Chantry is an old term used by Hermetic mages to refer to a mystic stronghold. It got adopted by the Nine Traditions as a common phrase. Other groups use different phrases; to agents of the Technocracy, such strongholds are called *Constructs* – places where the full force of Enlightened science may prevail. Nephandic mages speak of *Labyrinths*, where a person loses himself in the glory of the Void. Other groups uses traditional phrases – *temples*, *groves*, *circles*, and so forth – most of which get used by Tradition mages as well.

A Chantry's look and feel and purpose depend on the group that employs it. A Fallen Labyrinth might be a fetish club where no safewords are honored or allowed, an occult bookstore with a

challenging array of books that only certain people even realize are there, the law office of a particularly ruthless firm, or a mansion paid for by especially unholy means. A Technocratic Construct could be a genetics lab where research protocols go far beyond what normal labs can work with, an arsenal filled with gadgets that make Batman look like a Luddite, a luxurious penthouse office suite, or a bank that handles "very special" accounts. Form follows function in such a place. If the owners need a wax museum, gun range, or holographic danger room, then the Chantry has the essential facilities.

The size and scope of those facilities marks one of the main differences between a Chantry and a Sanctum: a Sanctum is modest, not especially magickal, and fairly small – a large room or two at most. It probably has a good feel to it, but you won't find floating stone heads that speak in tongues when someone enters a room. Chantries, on the other hand, tend to step outside Consensus reality; talking stone heads might be the *least* bizarre thing you'd find in one. Temples filled with small dragons or talking cats, labs out of Frankenstein's wet dreams, studio apartments that open out into endless fields... whatever a group of mages desires, you might find it in such a place.

That said, a Chantry's size, scope, and accoutrements are linked to the power of the mages who own the place. A tribe of gifted street-kids probably inhabits a squat with a few protective wards and a talking dog. The ancestral grove for a witchy bloodline could be filled with animals and plants that act as sentinels, plus a gateway to a pocket Summerland made just for them. A safe-house Construct for a team of Technocratic Black Suits might have extra floors, sub-basements you won't find on any blueprint, and a motor pool James Bond would envy. And the ancient home of mighty wizards... well, let's just say that Hogwarts wasn't based *entirely* on imagination! You can tell a lot about a group of mages by the Chantry in which they gather... assuming, of course, that you make it past the front door.

Life-Blood of Reality

Whenever possible, Chantries and Sanctums get set up in or around places of power: ancient altars, deep wildernesses, legendary peaks that haven't been climbed by every thrill-seeking idiot with an REI credit card. In such areas, you might say that the life-blood of Creation flows, gathers, and occasionally clots.

Nodes

There's a place like that, in fact, in this very park – a fountain whose waters taste fresh and clean no matter how many bums bathe in them or throw up in the basin. An old sculptor named Carlito Castrovinci made this fountain over 150 years ago at the commission of a donor listed only as "Anonymous" in the city registry. No birds ever shit on it, spray paint doesn't stick to it, and everyone who's tried to chip a piece off or carve her name in the marble has been disappointed. The fountain's waters never freeze, and its surface gleams as bright as it did on the day its stone was touched by Castrovinci's hand. Folks call this fountain The White Lady's Retreat. You can call it a *Node*: a mystic knot in an otherwise banal world.

Despite the somewhat clinical name, Nodes provide a refreshing sense of wonder. Even to people who don't believe in miracles, a Node *feels* special, more *Real* than real. Senses sharpen; perceptions deepen; breezes caress you as energy stirs beneath your skin. These are sacred spots with a distinct *presence* of their own. And to folks who know them for what they are, Nodes are precious beyond words.

That's not to say all Nodes are pleasant. Many are anything *but* comforting. There are Nodes in Auschwitz, Nodes in Normandy, Nodes that mark the spots of massacres. The Manson murders are thought to have been blood sacrifices that either made or celebrated Nodes, and Jeffrey Dahmer's home, before

Future Fates: Chantries and Horizon Realms

The scope and abilities of Chantries, as well as their connection to Horizon Realms, changes drastically between the first two editions of **Mage** and the **Revised Edition**. In the original editions, Chantries can be fairly powerful, with Earthly manifestations tied to even more powerful Horizon Realms. In **Revised**, the effects of the Ascension Warrior's rampage, the Avatar Storm, the Reckoning, and the apparent triumph of the Technocracy cut most Chantries off from Horizon Realms, exile their residents, and reduce their magickal potential.

Depending on the Storyteller's desires...

- **Chantries and Horizon Realms are greatly reduced and cut off from the Otherworlds:** As per **Mage Revised**, Chantries are little more than fortified houses with very few ties to larger mystic Realms. Technocratic Constructs are incredibly powerful, filled with gadgets and hypertechnology, and yet still severed from the offworld Realms where the Inner Circle ruled.
- **Many Chantries and Realms have been reduced, but powerful facilities remain intact:** The balance of power has shifted, and magick is rarer and more difficult than it had been before. Still, Chantries and Constructs can still be pretty marvelous places.
- **Nothing has changed:** Chantries and Horizon Realms are as potent and magickal as ever before... more subtle, perhaps, than they had been in the legendary past, but still miraculous in comparison to mundane facilities.

See **Chapter Four** for more details.

it was bulldozed, had supposedly become a Node as well. When I say that Nodes collect the life-blood of the world, that blood can literally be shed. Verbena witch-groves feed their trees with blood that's given willingly... and otherwise.

It's been said that Nodes are rare. I'm not really sure that's true. Nodes swell up wherever deep passions or massive expenditures of life force shape the fabric of reality. Haunted houses, battlefields, renowned churches, killing fields – all of them could contain or spawn Nodes. Natural phenomena, too, shape Nodes in places few human feet have touched. There are reasons that monks and hermits seek out distant sanctuaries; those waterfalls and mountain peaks hold Nodes that no one else has found.

If Nodes seem rare, I suspect it's more a matter of *perception* than of *scarcity*. Most people, even mages, don't recognize a Node until they're standing right on top of it.

The most obvious Nodes, however, have been claimed. Groups tend to build temples on top of them... or – if the Technocracy gets there first – labs or shopping malls. Famous Nodes tend to become bones of contention or war, as any resident of Jerusalem can tell you! Lourdes, Mecca, Little Big Horn, Sherwood Forest... they're not just *places*, they're *identities*. Folks often fight over them, protect them, conquer them in the names of gods and heroes. Just look at the controversy over Little Big Horn National Park, where people still argue over *what it should be called*. To name such a place is to claim its power for yourself.

Wellsprings

Some Nodes are temporary. Energy wells up in one place for a brief period of time and then evaporates back into the world at large. Such *Wellsprings* appear at times of great excitement or stress, generated by the life force of the entities who gather there. Those entities aren't always *human*, by the way. As my friend Painted Horse once told me, the Wellspring of a bison stampede feels like thunder beneath the earth... a thunder you can ride if you know how.

Potent Wellsprings can become Nodes too. Black Rock Desert, Tiananmen Square, the New York and Tokyo Stock Exchanges – all began as massive Wellsprings of human hope and fear. Now, though, they're all Nodes in their own right, pulsating with energy even when no one's there to generate it. Most often, though, a Wellspring exists until a certain event – a concert, a battle, a protest march – ends. Once the source of that energy departs, the energy either soaks into that place or drains away like rain after a storm.

Quintessence and Tass

Among mages, Nodes are treasured not only for their metaphysical value but for their restorative properties as well. See, mage Avatars absorb that *Quintessence* I mentioned earlier – the "fifth essence" referred to in arcane metaphysics. That essence fuels the latticework of all Creation, restoring the sublime energy within us. Just think of it as chicken soup for the Awakened soul.

Quintessence gathers along these knots and wells of reality. Sometimes it manifests in material forms called *Tass*. Think of Tass as ice formed from watery Quintessence: what flows as one becomes solid in the other. Tass embodies our metaphysical chicken soup, with Quintessence as the nutrition within that soup. And it takes a multitude of forms – water, roses, blood, food – that can be held, carried, and broken down into the raw Quintessence energy that sustains our Arts and lives.

Unlike the things I've shown you up till now, Quintessence isn't physical until it manifests as Tass... and even then, it's only halfway there. Although mages who study the Sphere of Prime can understand such forces more deeply than most folk do, Quintessence slips out of the realm of concrete things and into the realm of *seriously* subjective reality. It's slippery stuff, perceived by what people *expect* to experience. The nature of a Node often shapes the energy – the feel or flavor of Quintessence – but the ways in which that Quintessence manifests (if it manifests at all) can be wildly diverse. In that fountain over there, Tass feels like clear, cold water. A Node in Auschwitz or Wounded Knee, however, might give you blood, ash, or nightmares instead.

Quintessence is *luminal*. That means it exists at the threshold of what people call reality. It's like a flow of spirit-water, except that even *that* description can't capture what it truly is. You'll hear many different definitions or descriptions of Quintessence because every human definition falls short. It exists in the realm of poetry and metaphor, a shiny spark of liquid God.

Outside the physical elements of the periodic table, this energy is essentially the world's life force. It's one of those things people can *feel* but not quite *measure* unless their measurement methods reach outside materialistic science. It's as real as gasoline, but its properties transcend understanding. Quintessence is literally as real as you *believe* it is, and each person experiences it differently.

Science and Reality

Here's an important dividing line between what we currently call science and what we experience as reality: *Science* measures and defines repeatable, provable, and controllable phenomena; *reality* is what we perceive about the world as we move through it. There's plenty of overlap between them, but everyone – even scientists – experiences things that cannot be measured, repeated, or quantified.

Take emotions, for example. Emotions can't be charted; memories cannot be reliably graphed. One person might smell roses and think of her sweet first date, whereas another person smells their cloying musk and remembers her abusive mother's perfume. As I mentioned earlier, the saying "It's all in your head" is literally true: everything we experience gets filtered through our consciousness... and consciousness cannot be measured in a lab. The electrical impulses that signify love, anger, or

Resonance Between Editions

In **Mage Revised**, Resonance becomes a game system Trait. Earlier editions leave it as a Storytelling and roleplaying choice, except with regards to *Jhor* (the Death Resonance that infects mages who work with Underworld energies) and the Flaw called *Echoes*. **Mage 20** leaves the option to individual groups. For more details, see **Chapters Two (pp. 57-58)**, **Six (p. 338)**, and **Ten (pp. 503, 560-561)**.

memory might show up on a brain scan, but no process can define what those impulses mean to us.

In a very real way, then – and this is vital – *each one of us experiences our own reality*. Some of us just share those impressions on a bigger scale.

Science – even Technocratic hypertech – measures and defines *results*. Consciousness, on the other hand, involves *impressions*. Results often flow from impressions, but that's not always true. I can *feel* angry because the perfume you're wearing reminds me of a shitty ex-girlfriend, but unless I *act* on that anger, you can't prove my impressions in a lab. You might measure my heart rate, scan my brain, or make notes about the things I tell you, but *my reality is not quantifiable by science*. We are, each one of us, an alchemical codex that not even *we* can truly read, a codex that no one else could understand the same way we can.

That's not to say that science isn't real. I'm saying that science gets only part of the picture. The same holds true for religion too; the feelings that inspire faith cannot be quantified in books or rituals. At some point, science and religion fall short of experience... and beyond that point, magick takes over. And so, when you get to the fuzzier elements of our world – Awakened and otherwise – remember that words and charts and definitions are limited. Everything real is real differently, even when it covers common ground.

And if that sounds nebulous, you're beginning to understand why mages use such flowery descriptions. Art is the language of realities that science fails to understand.

Resonance Energy and the World at Large

If Quintessence is water and Tass is ice, then *Resonance* is the flavor of both. Here's where the "subjective" part of subjective reality takes on a recognizable element.

As I said earlier, when we were discussing the principles of magick, Resonance echoes the *intentions* and *emotions* behind the *actions* attached to that magick. The pure water in the White Lady's fountain provides an example of Resonance. In this case, Carlito Castrovinci left a part of himself in that masterpiece. It meant so much to him and was shaped with such loving care that it adopted a Resonance of comfort and purity. His art invested it with a tiny sliver of his soul.

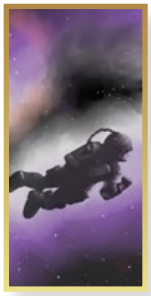
Resonance, like Nodes, can be extremely *un*pleasant too. That creepy feeling you get when you step into a child molester's basement is Resonance. You might feel it on the molester as well... possibly even on his victims. Traumas linger in the form of Resonance, tainting battlefields with the hatred that forged them. Also like Nodes, Resonance isn't limited to human activity. There are places that even the earliest humanoids could feel were somehow wrong, thanks to the Resonance around them. Remember this: *we are not the only shapers of reality*. Those things we call spirits, animals, aliens, and gods have powers as great as, and often far greater than, our own.

When I said earlier that we live in the world we've made, I was referring to Resonance. Even the dullest Sleeper adds a bit to the overall atmosphere. You could even say that mages manipulate Resonance with our magicks when we shape reality in our image. A modern Pagan saying, "That which you do returns to you threefold," reflects the Resonance effect. A controversial but inescapable element of magick, Resonance leaves a signature on magical acts. In extreme cases, it signs the mage as well as his activities.

In certain places and circumstances, Resonance attaches itself to a mage, echoing the effects of her actions. Candles flare when she walks by; milk sours and grass grows, flutters, or dies. The classical signs of witchcraft could be considered Resonance effects, and those phenomena can be extremely dangerous to mages who want to remain unnoticed. Technocrats and other hunter-types keep a wary eye out for Resonance echoes, so a wise mage is careful with the methods and intentions of her magickal acts.

So when you're looking at the effects of our activities, keep that "threefold return" principle in mind. The things you do, magickal or not, make a difference in our world... and the more powerful you are, the more – for better and worse – your actions transform it.

The Worlds Beyond



And now comes the interesting part.

The mortal world itself feels infinite. Never underestimate it or take it for granted. There's as much wonder in a Tennessee sunset or the vast expanse of Sahara sand as there is in any Otherworldly Realm. Everywhere in this world of ours, there are miracles in plain sight if and when you have eyes to see them.

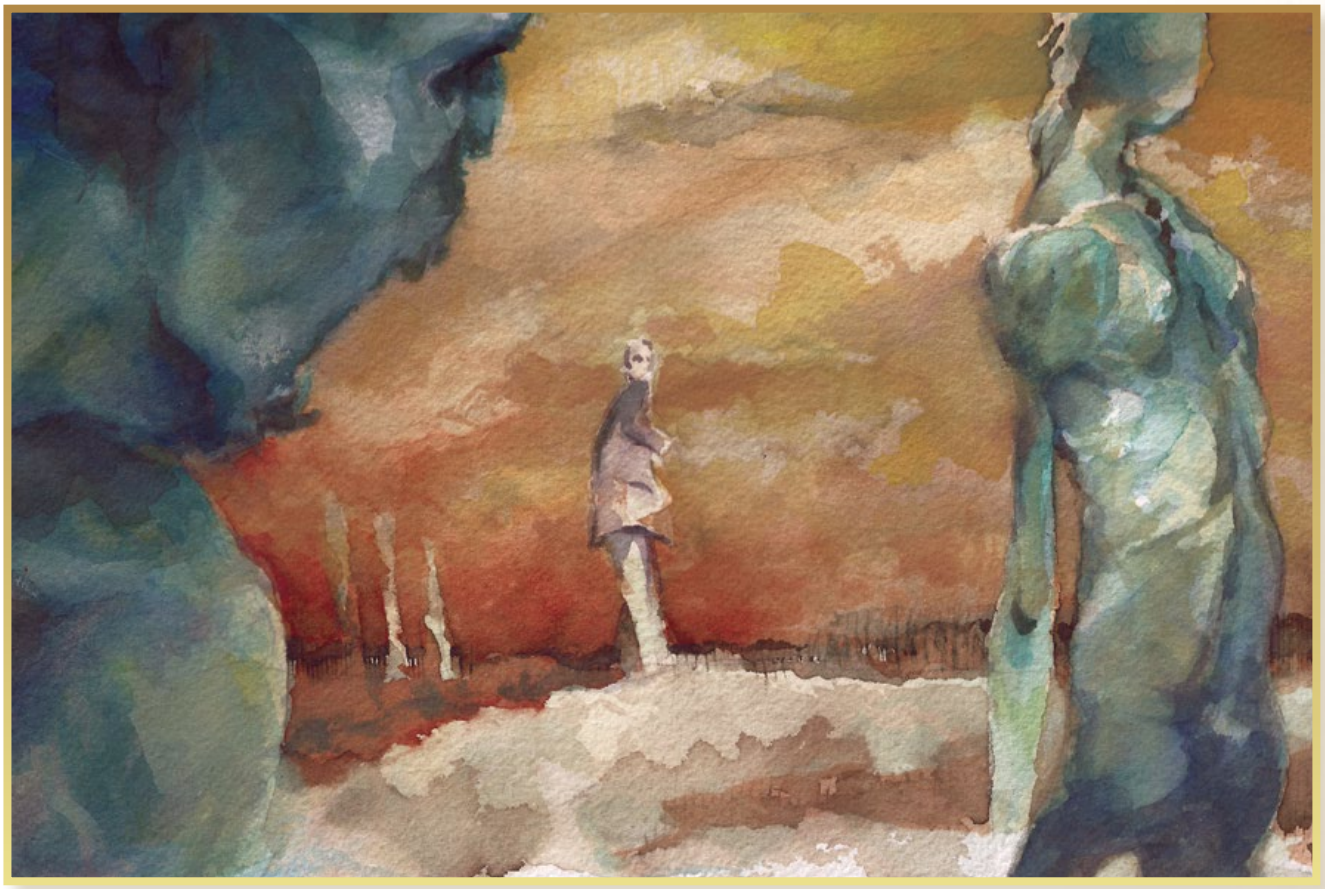
Perhaps the gravest tragedy of human existence is that we take so much for granted that we crave endless stimulation, often from false and banal sources. Folks these days would rather spend all day on the Internet – chatting about nothing with people they'll never meet – than take a walk outside and open themselves to the sensations they typically shut out. Just by watching this street right here with an observant eye and ear, you could see and hear new things. Not all of them would be pleasant... but then, miracles rarely are. Life is a great and terrible gift, wrapped in love and suffering; those who seek only *one* will never recognize *either* for the wonder it truly is.

And yet, our world holds far more than simply *this*...

The Periphery: Awareness of More

Almost everyone has flashes of the *Periphery*, that "corner of your eye" sensation that gives you a glimpse, a hint, of something beyond the materialistic world. These glimpses don't have to be visual, either. A person might smell whiffs of brimstone or roses that aren't physically there at the time. Or hear a whisper when no one else is in the room. Or catch a taste of pizza when she hasn't eaten any in a year. Dreams, déjà vu, that prickly sense of having someone "walk over your grave" – that's the Periphery. It's where experienced reality departs from scientific proof. You can't *measure* it, but you know it's *real*.

Certain people are more attuned to this level of reality than others are. We call that extra level of perception *Awareness*, with a capital "A." A person with this degree of Awareness can sense things most folks miss. She might see auras, note phantom smells, or feel especially drawn to or repulsed by people with strong Resonance about them. An Aware person could be thought of as a *Sleepwalker*: too perceptive to be truly asleep, yet not totally Awakened in the formal sense. Such Awareness often signals an imminent Awakening... *often*, but not *always*. Lots of people spend their entire lives at this level of



Future Fates: The Reckoning, the Gauntlet, and the Avatar Storm

In **Mage Revised**, events within the Reckoning metaplot turn passage through the Gauntlet into a torturous and potentially deadly ordeal. This Avatar Storm flays Awakened Avatars, inflicting serious damage on a mage's body and soul. Meanwhile, mages who journey outside of Earth's material realm for more than three months or so become *Disembodied*; their material bodies fade and leave only their spirits behind. The inhabitants of many Otherworldly Realms have therefore become ghosts of their former selves, their Realms now echoes of the places they once were. According to this metaplot, master mages and mythic beasts are now only spirit entities, existing in a haunted, Otherworldly limbo. Earthbound mages lose their connection to Realm-bound masters, so they must forge new Paths for themselves. This catastrophe is said to mark the End Times, reflecting magick's failure within the Ascension War.

In order to capture the flavor of "classic era" **Mage**, this Reckoning metaplot is optional in **Mage 20**. Depending on the tone and nature of your chronicle, you could regard the Avatar Storm in one of the following ways:

- **The Avatar Storm still rages:** Lashing Avatar Winds shred mages who dare to cross the Gauntlet, so few mages ever do. Otherworldly passage is a rare and treacherous thing, undertaken only under desperate circumstances. Travelers who *do* pass beyond the barriers risk transformation, death, and eternal Disembodiment. Thus, travel to the Otherworlds remains a desperate and uncertain endeavor.
- **The Avatar Storm was temporary:** After a horrific period of spiritual violence, the Storm subsided into a bad memory. Haunted Realms filled with spirits still drift throughout the Middle, High, and Deep Umbra, but the worst effects of the Storm have ended.
- **The Avatar Storm never happened:** Passage between worlds remains challenging but not torturous. Ignore all references to the Storm, Reckoning, and Disembodiment.

For game rules dealing with the Avatar Storm and its associated effects, see **Chapter Nine (pp. 476-480)**.

perception. "Gramma," folks say of them, "had a *feeling* about things." She might never have stepped across the threshold, but that old lady knew there was more to life than what was right in front of her.

Vidare: How You See the Edges of Our World

If the Otherworlds are an onion, then the Periphery is the *smell* of that onion. And as we know, some people love onions and others can't stand them. Extend that preference to a person's perceptions of the Otherworlds, and you have what Hermetic mages call the *Vidare*: the viewpoint through which that person perceives the Otherworlds.

A few moments ago, I mentioned that our expectations shape the reality we experience. The Vidare is a perfect example of that. A person who thinks in complex, abstract terms experiences the Otherworlds as a sparking latticework of elaborate geometry, filled with archetypal concepts and shining energy. Many of us call this the *Vidare Astral*, a heady perspective of vivid clarity. Scientists, academics, spiritual ascetics, and wired psychonauts tend to see the Otherworlds this way.

Meanwhile, a person who lives life with elemental passion experiences a sensual banquet of potent sensations. This *Vidare Spiritus* reflects a raw and vibrant perspective – life lived from the heart and guts. Shamans, witches, and Ecstatics view their world this way, with an animalistic purity that – though not always enjoyable – feels naturally *raw*.

Melancholy souls who regard life as the doorway to death endure the *Vidare Mortem* – a literally grave perspective. This is the proverbial "dirty glass," a grim view of the world as seen from the dirt beneath your feet. Whereas the Astral view sees bright colors, the Mortem offers up shadows; whereas the Spiritus perspective feels life rich with fang and claw, the death's-eye view reveals bones and decay.

How can three different views affect a single experience? Let's look at that oak tree over there: to the Astral perspective, the trunk and leaves shimmer with bright energy spun into geometric forms of dazzling precision. The Spiritus perspective smells the sap, glories in the roughness of the bark, senses the currents of life force drawn inward through the roots and leaves. And the Mortem perspective sees a column of rot, etched with insects carrying dead and dying matter between stark branches and soil-bound roots. All three visions are true – the oak tree is the sum of *all* of those things, and yet even more. Our personal experiences shade the way we perceive a greater reality. That's true *anywhere*, but it's especially true when we step beyond the borders of this mortal realm.

The Gauntlet

Now we come to the skin of the onion. And although the analogy's actually reversed – the Otherworld's layers *surround* our world, which would then be the *core* of the onion – it's helpful to think of the so-called *Gauntlet* as the skin you must bite through in order to reach the other layers.

Thinner in the wilderness than it is in built-up regions, the Gauntlet seems to conform to the local level of so-called civilization. Areas with heavy concentrations of industrial technology have very thick Gauntlets, but remote or haunted areas have thin ones. The reality inertia I've mentioned earlier has a lot to do with the Gauntlet's density; it's far easier to pass through that barrier in, say, Goa, India, than in midtown Manhattan. In deeply scientific places, it's almost impossible to penetrate unless you're using some sort of dimensional travel device. During this time of apparent Technocratic victory, the Gauntlet's quite difficult to pass.

Folks have lots of theories about the Gauntlet. In some myths, all the worlds were once a single realm, perhaps part of a cosmic One that shattered into Infinity. In the first Days, spirits and living beings were all the same thing, with no barriers between them. Gradually, though, forces of fear and dogma forced their realms apart, blocking passage with the Gauntlet. Other, less romantic, theories maintain that the realms *had* to be forced apart in order to protect the living from the dead or to seal off demons from the world of humanity. Certain theories blame the Technocracy, but that's absurd; the Gauntlet existed long before *they* did, and though they've certainly thickened it, that barrier isn't their creation. Other philosophies claim that the Gauntlet has *always* been there – the skin of our world, protecting us and holding us together.

Wherever it came from, however long it's been there, the Gauntlet exists. To reach beyond this world, you have to pass on through... and that's not easy. If it *was*, then *everyone* would do it!

The Avatar Storm

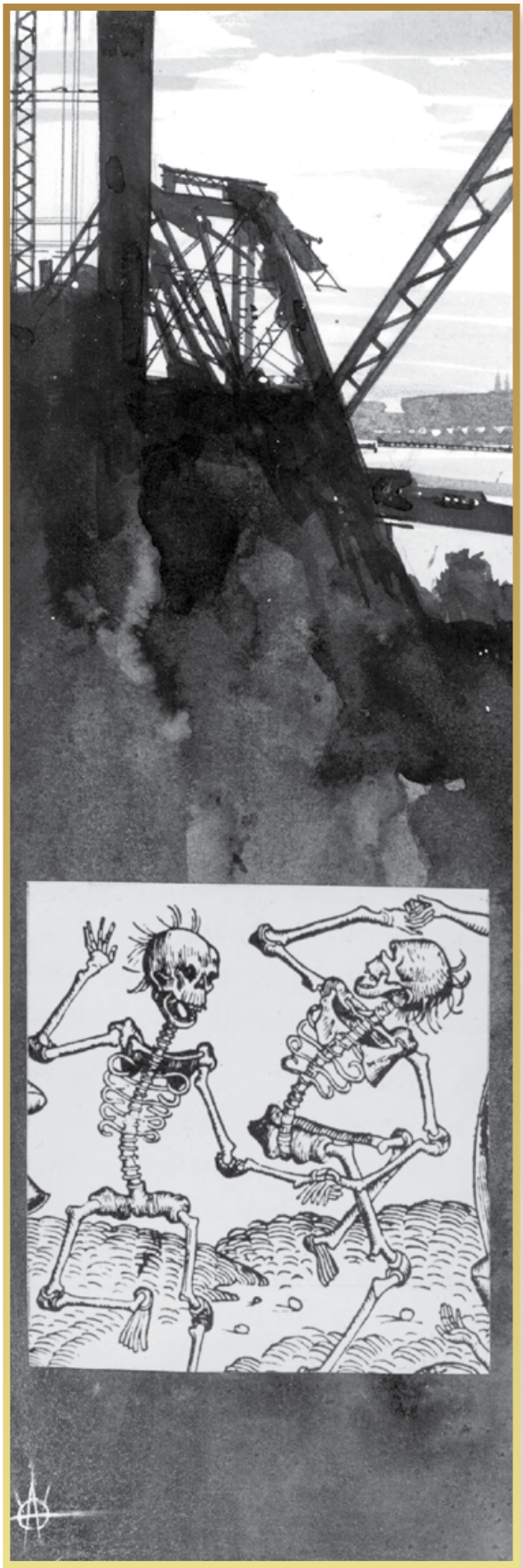
For a brief but terrifying period, Awakened travelers found it almost impossible to pass through the Gauntlet at all. Some metaphysical cataclysm (again, blamed on the Technocracy) shattered portions of the Otherworlds and filled the passageways with shrapnel. Awful cosmic winds tore around the Gauntlet, shredding the bodies and souls of anyone who dared to cross over. This *Avatar Storm* inflicted gruesome setbacks on mystic mages... especially those who called the Otherworlds a second home. In time, thankfully, the astral winds calmed down eventually, allowing passage through a thicker but no longer hazardous Gauntlet.

To Go Beyond

Before we take this tour past the park and into the Otherworlds, I want to point out something important: *most people never go farther than this*. I'm not talking only about the Sleepers but about the Awakened as well. Otherworldly travel is a dangerous and complex discipline, especially in the present day. And though certain willworkers depend upon the Worlds Beyond for their spiritual or technological practices, most of us never leave the mortal realm.

There are good reasons for that, too. It's easy to get lost out there and never find your way home again. And when the old cartographers wrote "Here be dragons" on their maps, they had only the barest hint of what's actually out there. Mages who *do* go beyond the barriers, however, become well-acquainted with the hordes of eerie entities that live outside this realm that we call home.

If, knowing that, you still want to cross over... well, that can be arranged...

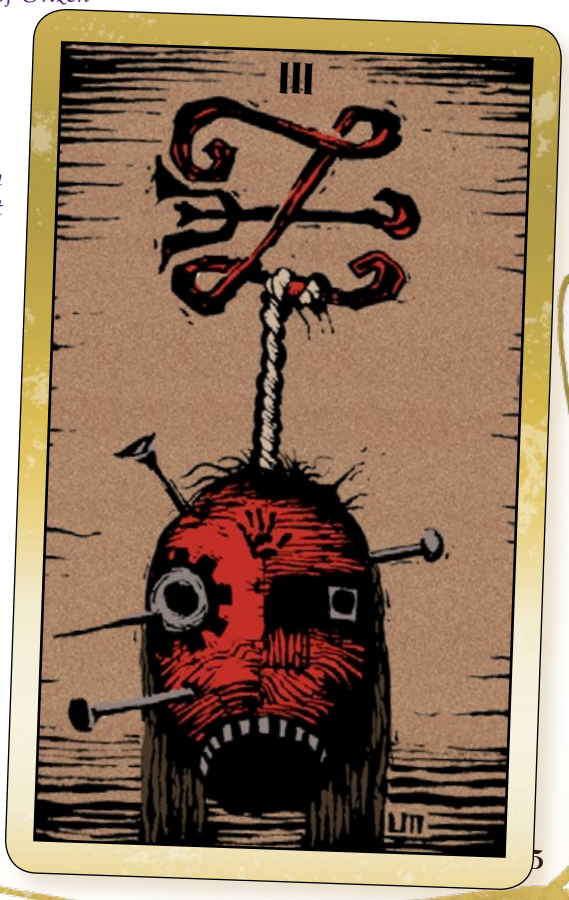


Chapter Four: The Worlds Beyond

But Eternals beheld his vast forests.
Age on ages he lay, clos'd, unknown,
Brooding, shut in the deep; all avoid
The petrific, abominable chaos...
— William Blake, *The Book of Urizen*

Three of Swords

Associations: *Sorrow; pain; upheaval; separation; focus on past; disorder...*



I scan the darkened ruins, seeking the exact spot where she fell through the cracks in the world. Feeling it come an instant, a nanosecond, before it crushed the city. The red-black pulse, rending, the shriek of twisted metal and shattering glass, earth moaning in agony as it ripped apart, sending her into the abyss. Stretching for her hand, knowing I could not reach her in time. Someone tackled me as I moved to follow. I lay in the broken street, shaking with the tremors that followed.

"God's will," they said, "A terrible tragedy." And they did nothing.

She's down there, calling for me. I hear her whispering my name. I am ready now. Marshalling my will to rescue her, I return, finding the site of her impromptu grave. The streets are dark and quiet; the area still ringed with yellow tape, a bulldozer lurking silently, ready to wipe away the ruination of building, street, and shattered lives.

I gather the power to me. And I strike.

The sky roars with lightning and blue thunder. Gale-winds lash the scattered brick and stone. The sulfur-stench of the world's bowels overwhelms me as I raise her from the depths.

I laugh as the city writhes and falls again.

Tortured earth rushes away in crazy quilt cracks heading for the part of the city that escaped the last rending. Sirens blare while dogs warn of disaster. Waves of earth hump and grind their way outward, scooping the

sea into a frenzy of shock. Hundreds of miles away, that brine will overwhelm some other land, coating it with my tears and pain, forcing others to see that they should have helped when I cried out for it.

She is here. Back where she should be – safe, as if she had never fallen.

I treasure her laugh, her knowing smile, her grace and elegance as she lifts her hands in wonder to see me again. I will leap into the sky and carry her away from pain and death and misery. She will be with me always, for I will never let her go again.

She is silent now, overcome by the crushed bones and blood-dyed corruption in her livid skin. Her eyes closed, her delicate mouth open and filled with earth as she hangs disjointed in my arms.

I watched a toymaker once as she repaired a broken doll. How hard can it be to do the same?

Beyond the Barriers

There's a fine line between courage and stupidity. Mages play jump rope with that line, hopping from skillet to crucible with the audacity of a pack of drunk teenage boys with a skateboard, fireworks, a camera, and a YouTube account.

That's most obvious when you consider *the Otherworlds*: that strange brew of spirit spaces and alternate dimensions woven throughout what we laughably call reality. Although I compared this mad cosmology to an onion earlier, it's not so much an onion as a snow globe of parallel existences all swirling around at once. You've got to be a certain kind of crazy to step into that snow globe... and mages often *are* that insane.

Back in the old days, that was no big deal. Find a portal, a Node, some spirit magick or a quirk of time and space; presto, you're good to go. Then the Avatar Storm turned the passage into a celestial cheese grater, which made that passage a bit more, shall we say, *problematic*. These days, it's a toss-up; the passage could be as easy as it once was before, or it might still turn an Avatar to shredded wheat. I think it depends a lot upon what you expect. In any case, it's not safe or easy. If it was, like I said, *everybody* would do it!

So what do you do if one world isn't enough for you? How do you reach these fabled Otherworlds, and what will you find if you do? There are no simple answers for that question, but if you want to explore the possibilities, let's find us a rabbit hole and pass on through.

Just don't say I didn't warn you...

Portals to Elsewhere

The easiest way to leave the Earthly realm is to find a *portal* to another world, open it, and go through to the other side. This might be as simple as opening the right door (or the wrong one...), but it might also involve elaborate rituals and permission before passage is granted beyond that door.

Otherworldly portals might be obvious – huge brass gates inscribed with ornate calligraphy, stone circles with chiseled runes, crackling vortices of coruscating energy – or subtle, like hidden doors that flip around an apparently solid wall and leave you *elsewhere*. The Chantry I mentioned earlier, with its rooms and floors that should not exist, is a place filled with portals – or it could be one large portal in itself. The interdimensional doorway of an Etherite laboratory or a Technocratic escape route? A portal. The dancing-circle of a witchcraft commune, where dancers get whisked off to the Summerlands? Also a portal. Portals simply get you from this world to somewhere else without having to step sideways or employ another discipline. Established with powerful magicks, these gateways provide relatively easy access to distant places "out of this world."

Shallowings

Perhaps the rarest form of access, a *Shallowing* is an area where the Gauntlet thins out almost to nothingness. Common in folklore but *incredibly* rare in today's world, a Shallowing lets someone walk into the Otherworlds simply by wandering in the right, or wrong, direction.

With very few exceptions, Shallowings occur in remote wilderness – regions where neither Technocratic procedures nor human banality have been able to seal the gap. Typically, these places wax and wane, appearing and disappearing like metaphysical fireflies in the dark. Fireflies often *do* mark the passage to such a place; so do heavy fogs, dust storms, tempests, or volcanoes. Nature, it seems, carves Shallowings with dramatic phenomena. Certain times of the year, too, mark a thinning between worlds; there's a reason that Christmas, Halloween, Easter, and Midsummer's Eve have reputations for uncanny events. Full-moon nights, misty mornings, the stroke of midnight – they're all known as times when a Shallowing might open. And although it's not likely that you'll walk through a foggy night and wind up in the Otherworlds, such things *do* happen more often than you might think.

The Old Roads, Paths of the Wyck, and the Null Zone

Legends tell of *Old Roads*, the *Paths of the Wyck* that were cut through raw Creation in the earliest days of humankind. It's said that only the most primal travelers – witches and shamans – can even *find* these Roads, much less travel them. According to lore, these paths can lead anywhere – to Tokyo alleys, Grand Canyon crevices, the mountains of the Moon, *anywhere*. Chilly, misty, and scary as hell, these legendary roads have more myth than substance. Though other mages claim to

Trashing the Umbrascape?

According to the Reckoning metaplot, the Otherworlds got seriously jumbled during the Avatar Storm. In the aftermath, many of the familiar landscapes and realms were hidden, scattered, or destroyed. Whether or not this is true of your chronicle's Umbrascape is a matter for your Storyteller to decide. Just be aware that this chapter's travel guide might be a bit different than the Otherworlds that your characters encounter.

For details about the Reckoning-era Umbrascape, see the sourcebook **The Infinite Tapestry**.

have gone through the Forever Mists, the Old Roads remain the exclusive province of mages who'll willingly dare Creation in her most elemental form.

More recently, travelers have noticed a *Null Zone*: a system of corridors and small and empty rooms that appear to connect the other regions. Sometimes referred to as "backstage at the Universe," this Null Zone seems to permeate every other layer of existence. Anyone, apparently, can use these hallways, though no one's found or made a map of them just yet. Travelers claim you could follow these corridors to the Moon or even further if you had enough time, determination, and supplies to walk such epic distances. It's been speculated that this zone is the form the Old Roads take in the modern world. If that's true, our industrial perceptions have taken something wondrous and turned it into a sterile maze.

For our sake, and the sake of all Reality, I hope that's not the case...

Astral Travel

A far more common and familiar path to the Otherworlds begins with the ancient discipline of *astral travel*. Meditating – preferably in a *very* secure place! – a traveler projects his consciousness out of his physical form, then flies off into the High Realms of concept and ideal. A traditional method of travel among monks, saints, wizards, and – more recently – transhumanist psychonauts, astral travel weaves a silver cord between the living body and the voyaging consciousness.

In astral travel, only your consciousness journeys onward. Generally, this takes you to what's often called the *High Umbra*, which we'll explore shortly. An experienced traveler can shift her consciousness to go to other realms as well, but the High, or *Astral*, Umbra is the default destination. Like the *Vidare Astral* I mentioned earlier, this is the domain of abstract, elevated concepts – the realm of heady things. So it's appropriate, then, that your "head-self" provides the easiest way to get there.

(A similar method jacks you into the *Digital Web* – the magickal side of the Internet. That's a whole other subject, though, that I'll get to shortly.)

Astral travel has two fundamental drawbacks: the first is that your body stays behind while you go voyaging, and that silver cord that links your two selves can be rather vulnerable. The second is that, unless you're very, *very* good at astral travel, you go there naked – bringing things along is extraordinarily difficult. Astral projection also employs your mental faculties, not your physical abilities... which is wonderful if you're exceedingly smart and *not* so wonderful if you aren't. An astral voyager essentially projects her mind-self, and so, if you use this mode of travel, you look like a silvery reflection of your ideal self-image. Fortunately for astral travelers, it takes a lot of confidence and self-understanding to master this discipline. Thus, an astral traveler may look more impressive than her physical self looks back in the material world.

Stepping Sideways

The most common way to reach the Otherworlds, however, involves what's often called *stepping sideways*. Using the Sphere of Spirit, a mage converts herself, and perhaps a handful of belongings, into *ephemera*: the elemental spirit matter that makes up that rarefied plane. This way, the voyager travels physically – transformed in essence, but more or less solid in the way that the spirit realm understands solidity.

Travelers who step sideways enter the *Middle Umbra*: that primal spirit realm embodying elemental Nature. Vividly *real* and yet fleetingly *un*real, this Otherworldly layer presents a strange mirror to the world we know in our daily lives. I'll go into more detail soon, but for now just remember that stepping sideways is probably the most familiar form of travel beyond the Gauntlet.

(There's a long-standing metaphysical debate about Shallowings, stepping sideways, and the form a traveler attains when passing through the Gauntlet. A person who enters a Shallowing tends to appear in the Middle Umbra, as solid as he was on the other side. Does he become ephemera when he passes over, or does he remain material? As far as I'm aware, no one has ever been able to answer that question conclusively. For all practical purposes, then, let's assume that our traveler is solid, even if his material form is actually spiritual in nature. If nothing else, that assumption makes one's brain hurt a little bit less when contemplating the trip.)

Stepping sideways demands an in-depth understanding of the Spirit Arts (or its technomagickal variant, Dimensional Science), a traveling companion with such knowledge, or a mystic or hypertech device that can perform the necessary functions for you. Like astral travel, this isn't an easy trip to make, especially not in the current age. In this regard, if nothing else, the Technocracy certainly has the upper hand. It might once have been a perfectly natural thing to cross over into the spirit realm, but that's certainly not the case anymore.

Dying to Cross Over

And then there's the most dangerous trip of all: the one we make when we die. The journey to the *Lower Umbra*, the realm of death, is not one I would recommend. Certain willworkers – notably the Euthanatos death-mages, some Dreamspeaker shamans, and other fearless and potentially corrupt mystics – have the skill and daring to cross over into this realm and then return. It's a difficult trip, though, and one that carries a bit of death back with you if and when you make it home alive.

Supposedly, a freshly-dead soul crosses over into this realm when she dies. In most cases, she moves on to whatever *Afterworld* awaits her – a heaven, a hell, an afterlife, or metaphysical recycling toward another incarnation. Occasionally, though, dead souls get stuck in this realm as ghosts, trapped in the bitter *Shadowlands* of our living world.

Living travelers who want to take this trip must endure a death ritual in which the soul remains tethered to the body through complicated magic. Certain psychoactive drugs can supposedly keep a person hovering between death and life as well, although this is – shall we say – not a method for the faint of heart. Like stepping sideways, these methods allow a person to cross over into the death realm. The chance of coming back across the threshold, though, is a *lot* lower here than what other methods offer. For certain tasks, of course, only death will do. And so, though it's incredibly perilous, this so-called *agama sojourn* suits several mystic practices.

For a while, this trip was impossible for anyone *except* the dead. A vast ghost-storm swept away all familiar aspects of the Shadowlands, rendering them impassible. These days, agama journeys are possible once again. I don't recommend that trip, though. Now more than ever, the effects of "temporary" death have proven rather permanent.

Beyond the risks posed by spectral creatures of this realm, a Shadowlands traveler also picks up a bit of *Jhor*, the Death Resonance. Essentially, death becomes part of a person who enters its realm, and although that Resonance fades a bit with time, I'm told it never completely goes away.

Disembodiment and Void Adaptation

All five of the methods involved in Otherworldly travel have their own risks. As I mentioned earlier, this sort of thing is best left to the experts. And even the experts fear *Disembodiment*: the state in which a living traveler goes too far or is gone too long. After three phases of the moon, or roughly three months by Earthly reckoning, a traveler's living body might begin to break down into raw spirit essence. The consciousness still drives this spirit, but the body fades away. Later, I'll mention *Ghost Realms*: places where the living inhabitants became spirits after their homes were cut off from the Earthly plane. Such uncanny regions remind us of the risks we take when we step away from the fields we know and journey off to unearthly realms.

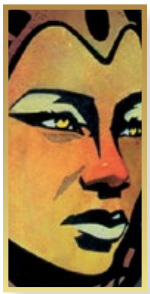
The Technocracy has its own name for this phenomenon: *Void Adaptation*. According to that theory, the physical and mental components of an Earthly being start separating once they cross over into another dimension. Eventually, the consciousness and physical body enter a quantum state of

complete disassociation. In plain English, the probability that binds them together has been dissolved, so the complete person can never return to the physical state she had occupied before. That person essentially becomes an *EDE*: an Extra-Dimensional Entity whose existence threatens the world as we know it.

Despite such risks, adventures beyond the barriers are traditional elements of the magickal Path. Even the Technocracy, whose ideals minimize contact with such unpredictable realms, sends certain members off to explore these alternate dimensions, if only to seal them off from the fragile human world.

So take a deep breath and hold my hand. That tingling stomach-flip will last a moment or two. An unlucky or inexperienced traveler can get stuck in the Gauntlet, but I've got decades of experience with this sort of thing, so you're safe with me. Although the Gauntlet and other hazards make this a challenging trip (and yes, in case you were wondering, drug-trippers *do* occasionally wind up crossing over – that's a common travel focus for Ecstatics, shamans, and the Virtual Adepts), the potential insights and adventures are worth the risk.

The Penumbra: Skin of the Realm



Passing through the Gauntlet's reality wall, we step out... or perhaps *in*... to what you might call the skin of the world: the *Penumbra*, an imperfect shadow of a deeper truth.

The Viewer Shapes the View

This is where those Vidare I mentioned earlier come into play. Although the Penumbra always feels surreal, the dominant impression you get about it depends a lot on your point of view. The heady traveler sees the shimmering patterns of the Vidare Astral, the elemental one senses the raw nature of the Vidare Spiritus, and the gloomy, grave one perceives the rotting realm of that Vidare Mortem. As a result, not only is it *possible* for a group of travelers to see a very different world when they hit the Penumbra together, it's fairly common for them to do so.

Even more than most things in a mage's world, travel into the Penumbra is subjective as hell, because although this layer of reality reflects the world on the other side of the Gauntlet, it also responds to each individual viewer. There's an interplay at work here that demonstrates the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle in vivid detail. The witness really *does* affect the situation.

For the average visitor – if you can call anything about visiting the spirit realm average – the Penumbra reveals a shadowy, mist-shrouded reflection of the Earthly side of the Gauntlet in that area. Sensations are paradoxically *muted* and yet more *vivid*... and if you can wrap your head around *that*, then you're ready to go exploring.

Domains: Glens and Blights

Take a look at our park *now*. The Bright Lady's fountain gleams a pristine white against the evening gloom. The splashing water rings like the chimes of some sublime instrument. The entire site casts a faint glow that illuminates the surrounding grounds. That glow marks this as a *Domain*: a place of exceptional power that shines through all three layers of the Penumbra.

Domains like the fountain radiate tranquility. Often called *glens*, they're places where Quintessence flows or gathers with refreshing purity. Other domains, though, are not nearly so appealing; reflecting areas of deep corruption, *blights* seethe with poisoned energy. The nearby dump probably has a blight or two, and the site of six murders down the street still throbs with atrocious echoes even now, long after the bodies have been cleared away.

Any Node forms a Domain in its vicinity, casting energies around the Penumbrascape. Small Nodes have tiny Domains, whereas larger ones can radiate their influence for several yards in each direction. Like lamps, they illuminate the area with appropriate radiance... which, in the case of blights, can be a sort of anti-light, swallowing up everything else within reach.

Impressions of Our Shadow

Past the edges of that fountain's Domain, the ground coils with thick shadows. The trees reach high into the misty night... higher, in fact, than they do in the Earthly realm. Cleansed of graffiti, the stone walls hold a weight and age to them that few people would recognize on the other side of the Gauntlet; here, they look regal, as if they'd been quarried from a magnificent castle. The grass grows higher and thicker here, free of the broken glass and dog shit that makes it such an eyesore in the mortal realm. The breeze, too, smells cleaner – hints of rot, to be sure, but without the exhaust fumes that permeate the city on the other side.

And yet you still catch glimpses of that city here: grim lattices of gleaming webs, crawling with mathematical spiders. These creepy bastards are often called *Pattern Spiders*, weaving a web of technological stasis. You'll see the damned things all over the Umbra, especially if you pursue the technomagickal Arts. Shamans hate 'em, and with good reason. Supposedly, those spiders present a metaphysical image of stagnation; if they ever succeed in weaving their web across the world, there won't be such things as possibility, magick, or imagination anymore. As things are now, the city looks like some haunted spider web, glowing with manmade light.

Look closely and you'll see one of the reasons these trips can be so dangerous. Moving through the shadows, slipping in and out of view, you'll spot spirits – in this case, the tiny

avatars of misery and corruption that feed on drug deals and furtive sex, the brave guardian spirits of the fountain, the urban animal spirits who refresh themselves at the fountain's edge, and the embodiment of the fountain: the White Lady herself. That's why that girl over there seems as solid as we are – she's not *human*, she's a spirit. Normal humans can't be seen on this side of the Gauntlet except perhaps as faint smears of spiritual presence in the air... and then only if they have some fantastically strong or especially corrupted soul.

Into the Mists

Eternally bathed in moonlight, the Penumbra clings to the landscape like a thick mist, shifting slightly but more or less in place. To find your way to other realms – often capitalized as *Realms* when you're referring to a specific place or a type of realm – you head off into those mists and hope you're going in the right direction.

How would you know? That's where experience comes in handy. A traveler who's skilled in cosmology; or who's spent time learning the secrets of the werewolves to whom this land is a second home; or who has been initiated as a *proper* witch or shaman (as opposed to those New Age fruitbats who wouldn't know a near-death experience if one gave them a heart attack) understands how to read the signs. Even then, though, finding your way through the Penumbra and into an actual Realm is tricky. Navigation in the Otherworlds is more a matter of instinct and intention than of direction... which is one of the *many* things about these realms that give people fits.

Navigation from this point onward is not a science – it's an art. You follow your instincts, aided by experience, skill, and more than a little bit of luck. Mages who have werewolf allies speak of *trods* and *Moon Paths*, but those sorts of things don't often work for our kind unless some other creature plays mediator for us. This is one of those areas where it's a good idea to listen to your Avatar; our Awakened spirits often understand this world better than our conscious minds do. The Otherworlds are often counter-academic. Human learning, at least in our era, seems to get in the way when you're trying to understand them. I've heard that people used to comprehend these things far better than we do now. But unless you've been raised in a shamanic culture, getting around once you pass beyond the Gauntlet appears to be one more of those things for which you have to unlearn all that you have learned. That said, technomancers who study Dimensional Science seem to have an easier time finding their bearings in the spirit world than most mages do. I guess that's yet another example of expectations shaping reality: if you *expect* to know what you're doing, you've got a decent chance at doing it.

Infinity Given Form

Speaking of expectations, there are two terms I want to explain before we go any further: *Tellurian* and *Tapestry*. Both are essentially metaphors for things that transcend words. When you're dealing with cosmic concepts, poetry usually speaks better than numbers.

The Tellurian

"Tellurian" essentially means *everything*. It's *Reality* with a capital R – everything that has been imagined, *can be* imagined, or *has yet to be* imagined. It's a word for something that transcends words... an ineffable name of God, if you will.

Why would the names of God or Infinity be unspeakable? The reason many religions forbid speaking the names of their God is because those religions consider Divinity to be beyond definition; to name it is to limit it... and thus, to insult it. Giving Divinity a name is to literally profane it – "to put yourself before the temple", or to place yourself above Divinity. And so, if you think of Infinity in Divine terms, the name *Tellurian*, or "little earth," offers an affectionate metaphor in place of that unspeakable name.

In academic terms, a tellurian is a model that demonstrates how the world works; following the ancient principle of *macrocosm and microcosm*, or "As above, so below," a tellurian reveals how the world works by offering a "small" demonstration. And although many mages in our era remain agnostic or atheistic, the mages who put the cosmic Tellurian metaphor in place were men and women of faith, so that metaphor was important... especially when they were trying to bridge faiths without insulting anyone's ideas about God.

Tellurian is another way of saying *Infinity*, *God*, or *Possibility*. It's potential that cannot be grasped except through metaphor. So when you say "the Tellurian," you're literally saying "Everything."

The Tapestry

Infinity is too big to wrap your head around. Like God, it needs a face. The Tapestry is that face – a metaphor for *that which exists*. Whereas the Tellurian is potential, the Tapestry is form. All woven together like some artistic curtain, the strands of interconnected existence create a shimmering whole.

Beyond the obvious pun about tying everything together, the Tapestry metaphor also makes a subtle nod to an ancient magical principle: the idea of *interconnectedness*. Sometimes known as *contagion*, this principle asserts that you can affect a thing – say, your landlord – by using something that's connected with it... in this case, perhaps your lease. And if this sounds like an outmoded idea, look up the quantum physics concept of *superstring theory*... an idea that also echoes the Tapestry metaphor.

Like I said, mages speak a language of poetics. Even the Technocrats resort to arcane acronyms and cumbersome yet Oh-So-Impressive titles. If you want to truly understand the magickal realm, much less the Otherworlds, it helps a lot if you can wrap your head around the idea of symbols that reveal a deeper truth.

Realm of Shadows: The Three Umbrae

When speaking to Umbral travelers, you'll hear a lot of talk about the *Three Worlds*. Briefly put, those are...

- ***The High Umbra***, astral realm of ideas;
- ***The Middle Umbra***, elemental realm of Nature; and...
- ***The Low Umbra***, mortal realm of death.

I've mentioned all of them earlier, but here's where those distinctions really become important. See, when you move beyond the Penumbra, you head toward one of those three destinations... unless, of course, you wind up wandering around the Penumbra or choose to remain there in order to reach another earthly destination. Lots of creatures, especially werewolves, use the Penumbra as a sort of secret door for moving around the mortal realm. Mages can do that too, simply by intending to stick close to the human world.

If and when you want to move beyond there, though, you'll employ different methods, depending on your intended destination.

Umbral Travel: Upwards, Sideways, Down

This is where that Vidare concept comes in handy again. A traveler who wants to reach a certain level of the Umbra has an easier time of doing so if she already sees the world in that fashion.

- If she views things through the Vidare Astral, she'll soon notice doors, mirrors, reflective pools, and other idea-based gateways into the High Umbra.
- If she's got a passionate Vidare Spiritus, she'll find herself drawn toward pathways through the mist, inviting groves, illuminated Moon Paths, and other features of the landscape that seem to beckon the traveler toward them. This, of course, is an *excellent* time to practice discretion and watch out for traps.
- If her melancholy temperament favors the gloomy Vidare Mortem, she'll perceive the rotting Shadowlands. In the distance, she'll hear the ever-moaning winds of *the Tempest*, an eternal storm that has been called "the Voice of Oblivion." Dour-minded reincarnationists claim that the Tempest is the whirl of Entropy itself, the karmic blender through which dying things are recycled for their next rebirth. It's been said that the Avatar Storm came up from this Tempest, after some sort of spiritual bomb had been dropped on a city of the dead. As with so many things in our world, that's open to debate. The idea, though, makes a certain degree of sense.

Regardless of your usual perspective, you can think yourself in a different direction if you have the proper magicks to reach all three worlds. Thinking upward can draw you toward the High Umbra, going with your gut can pull you into the Middle Umbra, and feeling down can take you toward the fringes of the Shadowlands... although, as I mentioned earlier, it takes specific kinds of magicks to reach the Realm of the Dead, unless you want to die first.

A portal, or an Otherworldly creature with the right powers, can take you almost *anywhere*. A traveler passing through a gateway, using an appropriate device, or riding on a spirit's coattails doesn't need magical knowledge in order to reach the Otherworlds. If you don't travel under your own power, though, then you're at the mercy of whatever force brought you there in the first place. For obvious reasons, this is *not* a method I'd recommend.

Since the late 1990s, such excursions have become much harder to make, at least in the increasingly industrialized world. For whatever reason – probably for *many* reasons – the Gauntlet feels thicker, and the journey on the other side has proven more hazardous than it was before. And yet, there are aspects to a mage's Path – mystic and otherwise – that cannot be fulfilled without such adventures. Whether or not you ever make the trip, I feel it's important to at least know what you might find in the Realms Beyond...

Resident Aliens

Most of the entities you'll meet in the spirit realm are just that: *spirits*. They sometimes *resemble* us, but they're not quite *like* us. These beings are embodiments of concepts and consciousness – the literal minds and souls of our world. Technomancers think of them as extra-dimensional aliens, and that's a fair assessment too. By the standards of our mortal world, such entities *are* implacably alien.

Trying to describe them in detail is a pointless task. Hermetic tomes and exhaustive demonologies contain the names and ranks of *thousands* of such entities, and any shaman worth that title can rattle off a bunch of names you'd never find in any of those books. There are idea spirits, animal spirits, embodiments of archetypes, and creatures who don't seem tied to any human idea at all. The awkward term *Umbrood* often gets used to describe such entities, but it's worth noting that many spirit beings find that term insulting. As God is reputed to have said, "I *am* as I *am*," and it's as good a way as any to think of these entities. They *are* what they *are* – Otherworldly Popeyes who must be honored on their own terms.

Remember that word, because it's important: *HONOR*. Spirit entities demand respect, and they often have the power to squeeze it out of you. Titles and greetings, offerings and acknowledgements are vital when you're dealing with the

A Brief Guide to the Otherworlds

Mage plays host to a bewildering array of Otherworlds. Here's a relatively simple guide to them, more or less in the order of travel:

- **the Tellurian:** A name given to the infinite whole of Reality, combining the material and spiritual worlds into one; also known as **Creation** with a capital C.
- **the Tapestry:** A metaphor for the structure of the universe – infinite potential given finite form.
- **the Near Umbra:** Everything between the *Hollow Earth* and the *Horizon*.
- **the Deep Umbra:** Everything past the Horizon.

Access

- **the mortal realm/ consensual reality:** The world as most people experience it.
- **the Periphery:** Basic spiritual Awareness.
- **the Vidare:** A person's perspective on the spiritual world.
- **Node:** A place of power.
- **Domain:** An area of profound spiritual influence.
- **the Gauntlet:** The barrier between the *Near Umbra* and the mortal realm.
- **Shallowing:** A natural hole in the Gauntlet.
- **Old Roads/ Paths of the Wyck:** Primordial pathways through the universe.
- **Astral travel:** Projecting one's consciousness into the *Otherworlds*.
- **Stepping sideways:** Transforming body into spirit-stuff.
- **Agama sojourn:** The only way to enter the Low Umbra without dying or being taken there.
- **Dimensional Science:** The Spirit Sphere as defined by mages who prefer to believe in technology and science. Under this viewpoint, the Otherworlds are simply alternate dimensions.
- **Portal:** A gateway to another realm or *Realm*.

The Worlds Beyond

- **Otherworlds:** When capitalized, this term refers to the various realms and Realms beyond the Gauntlet.
- **the Three Worlds:** Collective name for the *High*, *Middle*, and *Low Umbrae*.
- **Penumbra:** The layer closest to the mortal world, reflecting most of the features of that world.
- **Pericarp:** The Gauntlet bordering a Realm.
- **Realm:** When capitalized, a certain place or type of place in the Otherworlds.
- **High Umbra/ Astral Realms:** Realm of abstract thought and heady concepts. Divided into ***the Vulgate*** (region of common concepts); ***Spires*** (conceptual mountains of rising abstraction, including the Courts and peaking at the Epiphamies); ***Courts*** (homes of Umbrood entities and various ***Afterworlds***); and ***Epiphamies*** (sublime abstract concepts).
- **Middle Umbra/ Spirit Wilds:** Realm of capital "N" Nature. Divided into a variety of Realms and connected to the High and Low Umbrae by *Pattern Webs*. Also known as ***the Velvet Shadow.***
- **Low Umbra/ Underworld:** Realm of death, entropy, and decay. Bordered by the ***Shadowlands*** (the Penumbra of death) and haunted by ***the Tempest***. Various ***Kingdoms of the Dead*** are said to exist within that Tempest, but that depends upon the Storyteller's wishes, as the Reckoning metaplot did away with many of them.
- **Moon Path:** A spirit road through the Middle Umbra, leading and often moving between Realms.
- **Pattern Webs:** Metaphysical spider webs that bind the Three Worlds together.
- **Zones:** Ephemeral regions that float through the Umbrae as a whole. Existing separately yet interdependently within the Three Worlds, these are the *Digital Web*, the *Maya Dream Realm*, the *Mirror Zone*, the *Null Zone*, *Vistas*, and probably something else as well.
- **Mount Qaf:** Supposedly the center of Creation, existing outside the material world in a reality all its own.
- **the Aelder Bole/ the World Tree:** Like Mt. Qaf, a spiritual center of Creation based in a hidden place beyond Earth's physical realm.
- **the Digital Web:** Metaphysical reflection/ essence of the Internet.
- **the Maya/ Dream Realms:** Source and/ or reflections of dreams, possibly linked to the lost ***Faerie Dreaming***. Comprised of a baffling number of layers, none of which might actually be real to anyone except the person experiencing them.
- **the Mirror Zone:** Mysterious lost space where the normal order of things *as they appear to the observer* seems to be inverted.
- **the Null Zone:** Infinite corridors between the earthly world and Umbra realms; might be the current shape and/ or appearance of the Old Roads as seen by other travelers who've stumbled across them.
- **the Hollow Earth:** Fabled Inner Umbra that supposedly exists in an alternate dimension-space within the Earth.

The Horizon and Beyond

- **The Aetherial Reaches:** The inner layer of the Horizon, experienced from inside as the tops of mountains and wide open sky. The lowest Aetherial Reaches are often called ***Oblivion***, where Creation gets recycled.
- **Horizon:** Earth's massive metaphysical barrier, or outer shell. Also called the ***Dreamshell***.

A Brief Guide to the Otherworlds (Continued)

- **Horizon Realm:** A magickal/ technomagickal realm carved out of the conceptual space of the Horizon.
- **Anchorhead:** A demi-portal to Realms beyond the Horizon.
- **Ghost Realm:** An ephemeral Realm in which the place and its inhabitants were cut off from Earth and have since become Disembodied spirits.
- **Shade Realms:** The spiritual shadows cast upon the Horizon by the *Shard Realms*.
- **Shard Realm:** Metaphysical embodiments/ reflections of the planets and the mystic principles associated with them.
- **Paradox Realm:** A Realm of punishment or isolation caused by a bubble of misused magick.
- **Etherspace/ Deep Umbra:** The infinite reaches of space, where the spirit and material realms supposedly become one.

(**Mage Revised** introduces a second Horizon at the borders of the Asteroid Belt; the space between those two Horizons is referred to by the old name of *Etherspace*, with the Deep Umbra being the reaches beyond that second Horizon. For details, see Chapters One and Five of **The Infinite Tapestry** sourcebook and Chapter Three of **Convention Book: Void Engineers**.)

For detailed game systems that deal with access and realms, see ***The Otherworlds* (pp. 474-485)** and ***The Digital Web* (pp. 465-473)** in **Chapter Nine**.

For in-depth explorations of those Otherworlds, see the **Mage** sourcebooks **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds**, **The Infinite Tapestry**, and the various **Digital Web** editions, plus the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** sourcebooks **Umbra: The Velvet Shadow** and the various **Book of the Wyrm** editions. For the Low Umbra, see the **Wraith: The Oblivion** series.

Tychoidian Cosmology, the Enlightened Anthropic Principle, and Dimensional Science

The Technocracy's view of the Otherworlds comes largely from *Tychoidian cosmology*: the view of a computerized cosmos based upon Tychoides' theorem: *any perfect description of an object is the object itself, relegated to the order of things by divine providence*. Essentially, this means that the universe makes room for things that appear to fit into it. If a concept is malleable enough to conform to existing laws, it can be integrated into the existing universe if and when that universe chooses to accept it.

A complementary idea, the *Enlightened Anthropic Principle*, assumes that sentient beings decide what the universe will and will not accept. For the Masses, that choice is unconscious; the Awakened/ Enlightened Ones, however, can *consciously* change those laws to some degree. All mages accept that idea under one name or other; technomancers accept it as a law of science. And so, under the Technocracy's Dimensional Science, the universe has been divided into various levels of reality by the Consensus of Enlightened and unEnlightened humanity. In short, weird stuff exists because it *can* exist... some of it is just more *likely* to exist, and Enlightenment helps you tip the odds of it existing.

Under Dimensional Science – a hypermath fusion of *A Mechanistic Cosmos*, *Everything is Data*, *Might is Right*, and *Tech Holds All Answers* **(see *Paradigms*, Chapter Ten, pp. 568-572)**, the difference between reality models is mostly a matter of probability. Enlightened people can try to reprogram reality or shift between levels of reality when they understand the code. Tychoidian cosmology divides up the universe into the following layers, all of which can be accessed by sufficient understanding of Dimensional Science:

- **Conventional Space:** The mundane plane of reality where the laws of nature follow what the Masses expect to happen – that is, the reality that's most likely to exist. This Space extends from the Earth to the Asteroid Belt between Mars and Jupiter.
- **the Gauntlet:** The paraphysical membrane between the Conventional Earth Space and *Subspace*.
- **Subspace:** The Umbrae, shadows of probabilities that aren't fit enough to become part of Conventional Space. These include...
- **Biospheric Space:** Reality-model shadows shaped by non-sapient thought and human instinctual responses; the Middle Umbra.
- **Ensemble Space:** Reality models of abstract and intellectual concepts; the High Umbra.
- **Entropic Space:** Reality models generated by decaying consciousness; the Low Umbra.
- **the Digital Web:** Reality model of dense yet programmable artificial data structures.
- **Everett Volumes:** Passages into alternate timelines, where other realities exist because they had a mathematical probability of existing; the Mirror Zone and/ or alternate-history worlds.

Tychoidian Cosmology, the Enlightened Anthropic Principle, and Dimensional Science (Continued)

- **the Horizons:** Two layers that mark the limits of influence and computing power from Earth's intelligent life. These are...
- **the Biospheric Horizon:** The upper reaches of Earth's atmosphere, and the limit of influence for non-intelligent life forms. Could be seen as the old Horizon known by werewolves and primal mages.
- **the Spatial/ Anthropic Horizon:** The limit of Earthbound human influence. Reaches more or less to the Asteroid Belt and marks the end of Conventional Space.
- **the Deep Universe:** Region where human influence over reality breaks down; outer space. Extends roughly from Jupiter to the end of Earth's solar system.
- **the Interstellar Deep:** The Void of human-based reality.

If all this seems esoteric, that's because it is. Most Technocrats don't even *begin* to understand such stuff, and few people outside the Technocracy even realize that it exists. A few Etherites, Virtual Adepts, techno-Hermetics, and other tech-based mages have heard of the principles and their terminology, but, for the most part, only Void Engineers truly *get* it. For details, see **Convention Book: Void Engineers**, pps. 54-61. For the Sphere of ***Dimensional Science***, see **Chapter Ten (pp. 525-526)**.

spirit world. In the Umbra, a bunny-sized ball of cuteness can become a hurricane, so always – *ALWAYS* – be on your guard and best behavior. Although wizards and werewolves tend to order such entities around, that's a pretty unhealthy habit unless you can back up your arrogance with power.

The Three Worlds tend to feature related types of entities:

- **The High Umbra** hosts angels and demons, archetypes and godlings, personified ideas, and self-willed geometric shapes. You'll spot naked astral travelers bound by vital silver cords; magnificent fractals in coruscating clouds; and creatures out of nightmares, mythologies, and dreams, most of which wear a dazzling array of faces and forms.
- **The Middle Umbra** features spirits of Nature, ideal, and corruption – werewolves, totem beasts, majestic animals, and malignant puddles of spiritual ooze. More than any other realm, this world features mortal humans too... some of whom are centuries old, having crossed over long ago and entered an ageless state of grace.
- **The Lower Umbra** is the realm of ghosts – the Restless Dead whose lives were cut off before they'd been resolved. Such entities can be pathetic videos of people who got stuck in a single moment of time, self-willed phantoms with agendas of their own, the horrific spectres that come from a person's worst attributes, and the strange monsters that haunt this shadow of the living realm.

In all cases, remember this: in the Umbra, *they're* home and *you're* visiting. Be a respectful guest, not an obnoxious pest, and you'll go farther and live longer in those worlds.

The Astral Umbra, Realm of Ideas

Mages, for better and worse, tend to spend lots of time in our heads. It's natural, then, that the High Umbra – a.k.a. the Astral Reaches – becomes a typical first stop for our kind. Whether or not they travel by astral projection or step sideways into the High Penumbra, Awakened travelers often gravitate toward this realm of ideas.

Peering through the Vidare Astral, you'll perceive the strands of Creation weaving together in sublime patterns of energy. A sense of magnificent *clarity* prevails: sharp sensations, vivid perceptions, a feeling of constant epiphany. A friend of mine calls this "*the 'Of Course' Factor*." It's like putting on a new pair of glasses or having that light bulb over your head suddenly replaced by a halogen lamp. And although you eventually get used to that extra level of clarity, it never really goes away while you're there... and once you leave, the rest of the world feels suddenly duller, as if those fresh new glasses had been replaced by scratched and dirty lenses. That's a common problem, actually, among astral visitors: upon returning to the mortal realm, that real world never feels quite as real again.

The Astral Penumbra

As I mentioned earlier, the layer closest to the mortal realm is called the Penumbra. And for travelers who either project themselves astrally or step sideways into their Vidare Astral, that Penumbra looks and feels like a glittering, ultra-clear reflection of the mortal world. Symbolic elements of the landscape become quite – often *blatantly* – obvious. A public school, for example, might look and feel rather industrial: square, blunt, maybe with cattle pens, assembly lines, or even a giant meat grinder straight out of *Pink Floyd's The Wall*. Even at this Penumbra level, the

idea of things dominates the surroundings. By entering the Astral Penumbra, we're walking into the literal landscape of the mind.

Here's an important reminder: *the High, Middle, and Low Penumbrae are all the same place.* The differences between them don't reflect the Penumbra itself – they reflect the travelers who go there.

Once you move *beyond* the Penumbra, though, that's an entirely different matter...

Astral Doorways

A traveler can move around the skin of the mortal realm from here, which is how an astral traveler can project his consciousness from a monastery in Tibet to a classroom in New Orleans. The silver, nude, idealized form of that traveler exists in the same Penumbra as the shaman who steps sideways and the gloomy Goth who sees that realm as a beautifully decaying mess.

To move past that reflection of the mortal realm and ascend higher into the Astral Reaches, those adventurers must find an *astral doorway*: a shining pool, a vivid window, a mirror, or a literal doorway that provides passage into one of the High Umbral Realms. Stepping through one takes you out of the mortal realm's reflection. That's where the real challenges begin.

The Vulgate

Generally, astral doorways simply open for the person who finds them; occasionally, you'll need a password or other form of key. Once you get through that entrance, you'll find yourself in the *Vulgate*: the portion of the Astral Umbra dedicated to common concepts and easily-grasped ideas. Here, the truly weird aspects of the High Umbra begin to manifest: flying eyeballs, four-dimensional temples, Escherian landscapes, and snowing geometry... that sort of thing.

In the Vulgate, you can find endless hallways filled with doors; rivers that speak in human languages; glass-tree forests where each leaf is a memory; places where the local reality takes on the flat, brightly colored, and caricatured appearance of an old-school comic strip... complete with word- and thought-balloons. Libraries where books that were never written can be found, philosophical paradises in which abstract theories like Communism and anarchy really *do* work the way their proponents say they should work... If you took the analogy of Plato's cave (which actually exists here, by the way), where people see the shadows cast on the walls and believe it's reality, the Vulgate is where the watchers start to turn away from the wall and begin to see the things *casting* those shadows.

And no, that view isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Like all portions of the Otherworlds, the Vulgate can be scary as hell... and yes, you'll find *real* hells in the High Umbra too, shaped by the things people fear about the concept of Hell. Beyond the freaky shit that's part and parcel of the realm, there can also be a terrifying sense of disconnection. We humans are accustomed to the world as we know it; when you take that world and start breaking it down into its conceptual components – when the blinders we wear come off whether we want them to or not – the experience can be unnerving, depressing, even shattering. There's a desert where the reflective sands show you the way that *other people* see you, stripped of all your self-identified illusions, and a realm in which the shared hallucination of money is revealed by stacks of phantasmal treasure.

A traveler can feel her senses disassociating themselves from one another, breaking her perceptions into a fractal broken mirror rather than a coherent whole... or worse, she can actually see herself from outside her skin, watching that skin peel off or melt to reveal the muscles, bones, and mushy goo beneath her illusion of self. This is the realm of bad trips as well as ideals, and of ideals that reveal themselves in all their potential ugliness... an ugliness made even worse because of its purity of truth.

Pericarps

Like many other Umbral Realms, the Realms within the Vulgate usually appear infinite when you're inside them. Space has no real meaning here. Although Realms have barriers around them – little Gauntlets that are sometimes referred to as *pericarps* – those barriers are typically invisible to folks within the Realm. As usual, there are exceptions, places where you really *can* reach the Edge of the World. For the most part, though, a traveler must be *looking* for that Edge of the World to even have a chance at finding it.

Most often, the Astral Realms have doorways leading to other Realms that share a conceptual link to the realm in question. You could, for example, find a path to Heaven if you've gone through Hell to find it. Once again, however, the traveler must hold her destination in mind if she wants to find it. It's frighteningly easy to get distracted in the Otherworlds... and, by being distracted, to get horrifically, perhaps even fatally, lost.

For non-astral travelers, the Vulgate is as far as you can go without help. Although some other entity might open a portal to a higher Realm, we poor mages are stuck wandering around the High Umbra's basement until and unless we learn to untether our consciousness and project it upwards to a higher plane. It's hard to talk about the higher Realms without using air quotes and dense metaphor, because language is such a limited thing. To reach beyond the Vulgate, you have to also reach beyond common ideas and into the realm of abstract thought...

The Afterworlds

Did you ever wonder if Heaven and Hell really exist? They *do* – and there are *LOTS* of them. Every vision anyone has had of Paradise or the Pit has a dedicated Afterworld in which that concept becomes reality. The really popular ones, like Dante's Inferno or the Pearly Gates, are vast, perhaps even infinite, fueled by their place in the popular imagination. Others, like the proverbial personal hell or little slice of heaven, are just big enough for the one or two people who originally envisioned them.

Do souls go to such places for eternity? That depends, I guess, on them.

The Afterworlds remain one of the great mysteries of the universe. Do they exist because we create them, or were they there before we conceived of them? Did godlike beings shape

these realms for human souls? Or is it like Alan Moore once said, that "these halls were carved by men while they yet breathed"? No one has the right answer to those questions. The nature of subjective reality means that even the most dispassionate authority on the subject sees what he expects to see.

Here's my theory: people who expect to go to Heaven or Hell go to the heaven or hell they expect to go to. A human consciousness, upon death, projects itself to wherever that consciousness deeply believes it deserves to go. Some consciousnesses remain stuck in the Shadowlands as ghosts, others disappear into instant reincarnation, and the majority of them head off to the Afterworld they expect to enter after death.

"Expect" is a tricky word. I assume that a lot of people who consider themselves pious yet deeply fear Hell (the same people who secretly believe they deserve to go there) wind up in the Hell they fear, not the Heaven they crave. How long do they stay? Who knows? Maybe as long as they expect to stay... which could be a very long time. Are they sent there by God/ Goddess/ the Gods/ Whatever, or do they send themselves there? Folks have disputed that for centuries, if not millennia. One thing, though, is beyond dispute: these places exist, and people can go there.

Sometimes even before they die.

Mages who are brave, desperate, devout, or crazy enough to try to visit the Afterworlds can do so. The passage is difficult, frustrating, and often deadly, but as myths and stories suggest, it *can* be done. We're not going to go there right now, but the potential to do so exists if you're willing to sacrifice everything you think you know about yourself and your world. There are reasons that people call such searches "underworld journeys" and "dark nights of the soul." It's a perilous trip no matter where you're bound... and again, you often find what you expected, on some level, to find there all along.

Do gods and angels and demons exist? They *do*, if only because we *believe* they do. That's another chicken-and-egg dilemma, where the chickens – that is, *us* – have the idea of "egg" pretty firmly in our heads. For now, just remember this: if you would search for Heaven or Hell, recall that gods and angels and demons have long traditions of kicking mortal ass... and the prouder the mortal, the worse the punishment.

The Umbral Courts

That brings me to *the Courts* – another type of region that we won't visit *now*, but you should keep this in mind for future reference. Gods and angels and demons and other entities make their homes in the Astral Umbra. These courts can be whatever the resident entities want to make them: temples of light, clockwork dominions, deserts of shadow, thrones of blood and fire... they're all out there someplace.

Occupying more or less the same conceptual layer as the Afterworlds, these Courts are shaped not by human expectations but by the plans and desires of the entities that forge them. (The

entities *themselves* might be shaped by human beliefs, but... well, Chicken, meet Egg, and you guys can go sort things out between yourselves.) Umbral entities keep their Courts in whatever fashion seems appropriate to them; you could sip tea with a Mad Hatter or three in some Wonderland (there are several...), pay a visit to a Monkey King's prison beneath a mountain, knock on Heaven's door to have a chat with an entity called Saint Peter, or go visit Santa's workshop in one of the several dozen North Poles floating around the Astral Reaches... and hope that you get the Santa you had wanted to find!

This might be the most crowded region of the Otherworlds. There are *so many* Umbral beings and *so many* concepts out there regarding heavens and hells and their holy and unholy inhabitants that the Astral Umbra could be seen as a giant fizzy cup of soda, with bubbles crowding the top of the glass and a film of sediment at the bottom. Unlike that glass of soda, though, the Otherworlds don't occupy physical space. They *seem* physical when you're inside them, but a theoretically infinite number of Realms can exist without shoving the others aside.

The Spires

Rising here and there throughout the Courts, rooted in the Vulgate but peaking upward into infinity, you'll find *the Spires*: reflections of the idea of higher consciousness. As with so many other things in the Otherworlds, the Spires turn abstract concepts into concrete forms. Some of them appear as towers, minarets, or mountains that make Everest look like a speed bump. Many resemble glass cathedrals with spires that fade into the sky. I've seen beanstalks leading into the clouds and literal stairways to heaven. They're all Spires. So if you want to get your head in the clouds, then you'll often have to climb these things. And *that*, my friend, is not easy!

Climbing a Spire isn't a matter of *physical* effort but of *meta*physical ascent. It's not your hands and feet that move you – it's your mind. The slopes can be slippery, treacherous, impossible to grasp. In order to rise up those Spires, you must wrap your mind around difficult concepts and drift beyond the gravity of common thought. Few travelers can make that journey at all... and only the most rarified can reach the top.

The Epiphamies

Swirling around the highest reaches of consciousness, the Realms within the *Epiphamies* are realms in name only. These regions are too abstract and ephemeral to feel much like our crude constructs of reality. Composed of symbols and superluminal concepts, these regions drift in and out of contact. For the astral traveler, Ephiphamy Realms remain solid for a few fleeting moments. Such mysteries are too transcendent for a mortal mind to grasp for long.

Astral travel is the only way to reach such regions. Sleeping or inspired mortals can flash into the Epiphamies for brief seconds, but those visitors quickly fade out of that space, hopefully with memories of the visit to guide them through their imperfect lives. Even astral travelers can remain there for only a short time. It's a place where the ground literally shifts under your feet... except that there's no actual ground *or* feet involved!

Imagine the love-child of Salvador Dali and Dr. Seuss. Now imagine it as a world. And *now* imagine that it exists because you imagined it. That's the nature of the Ephiphamies. Fleeting concepts get smaller worlds, whereas lasting concepts, backed by millions of minds over hundreds of years, have massive regions with something approaching a stable nature. Within the Epiphamies, you might find a Fortress of Government that represents the symbolic might and futility of that concept; a River of Language that flows with the sounds of every dialect ever spoken on Earth; a titanic chiming clock with a thousand hands, each one marking some measure of Time; the realm of Platonic ideals, which exists perhaps only because Plato imagined that it might. There are tortured halls of Art and mindscapes so bizarre that Dali himself might have been amazed by them. You'll find realms based upon not only our popular images of holidays (though those exist as well) but around the very *ideas* those holidays represent. In short, the Epiphamies are as boundless as imagined consciousness itself.

There are said to be Realms within this domain where mortal minds cannot go at all – regions too transcendent for human consciousness to grasp. Are they the dreams of gods? The secrets of the Universe? Who can say? That which we cannot imagine, we cannot travel to... just yet. As human history has shown, though, we puny mortals are capable of expanding our imagination to apparently limitless degrees.

Again, who knows? Perhaps someday, you'll visit an Epiphamy Realm that hadn't existed until you conceived of it yourself...

The Middle Umbra, Reflection of Life

From the head to the gut, travel through the Otherworlds becomes a simpler matter. The dizzying Spires give way to the heart and innards of Nature Herself, red in fang and claw and rose and sunset. This is the domain where beasts and men and beast-men dwell. Far from the abstract puzzles of the Epiphamies, this is as real as it gets.

According to certain primal mages, *everything* used to be like this. The Middle Umbra reflects Earth as it once was, with newer Realms arising to mark the things we have done with, and to, our world since then. I don't know if I agree with that... but then, as usual, it's a puzzle with no single answer. In contrast to the fleeting subjectivity of the Astral Reaches, though, these Spirit Wilds feel far more secure.

That's not to say that it's safe or pretty. Anyone who's ever spent time in the wilderness – real time in the *REAL* wilderness, not an afternoon in the park – knows how awful Nature can be. There are reasons we frail critters built our houses and farms and factories and all that stuff: nature's *scary* when you don't have technology at your beck and call. Although travelers can step sideways with certain goodies in hand, mortal technology has a funny way of malfunctioning in the depths of the Spirit Wilds. Because the only reliable craft in this region is the bone-deep knowledge of primal magicks, shamans and witches do far better here than do heady wizards or tech-savvy mysto-geeks. Folks who recognize that beauty is often raw and terrible feel most comfortable in this Spirit World.

The Spirit Penumbra

Viewed through the Vidare Spiritus, the Penumbra shines in luminous fog. During the day, the sun's faint illumination turns that mist to a glow; at night, moonlight illuminates the shining shadows. Man-made structures sometimes disappear when you shift from our world to this one. Remember that construction site? Look – it's gone now. In its place, there's a ghost of the ice cream parlor that stood there for 40 years. And that's one of the tricks this Velvet Shadow plays: the Penumbra shows the *memory* of places, the *spirit* of them, more than the concrete "reality" of them in the mortal realm. Once again, the word "reality" belongs in quotes. Getting hung up on preconceived notions of what's supposed to be real in this world is a very good way to get lost.

Airts and Moon Paths

Getting lost is easy in the Wilds. The tricky landmarks and constant mist make navigation difficult. We could wander around in this twilit reflection for ages... assuming, of course, that something didn't eat us first. Take a look around – we haven't really moved at all, but how much of this landscape can you recognize? You could "follow your heart," of course, but without signposts to guide you, how would you know where that might lead?

Thankfully, there *are* signposts if you know where and how to look for them. Unlike the High Umbra – which usually offers you a door or portal to step through – the Middle Umbra sends more subtle signals. Shamans, priests, and witches are trained to look for omens, and with good reason. Middle Umbral pathways, sometimes known as *Airts*, reveal themselves within such signs: a handful of broken twigs, a meaningful pattern in the dirt, the cry of a raven that perches where one hadn't perched a moment ago. By following these signs, a mindful traveler can get where she needs to go.

More obvious than Airts, the luminous *Moon Paths* shine their way through the mist. Moonlight picks out a rough road through the Umbrascape, often heralded by shining entities called *Lunes*. Again, a traveler who knows how to follow such a road might reach her destination, assuming that she knows the proper rituals too. Lunes, as I mentioned earlier, are spirit beings; they want to be recognized and honored as the powers that they are. Some are tricksters too, like the fabled will-o-wisps that lead a traveler into bogs or over cliffs. And then there are the werewolves who use Moon Paths as well... and who rarely appreciate mages on their sacred roads! A Moon Path marks a clearer journey, but it's often a dangerous route.

Pattern Webs

Strung here and there, spiritual cobwebs hang throughout the Velvet Curtain. According to legends, they're spun eternally by some vast cosmic Weaver – a spider-god with infinite offspring. These creatures hold the Universe together, and the strands they use to do so are most obvious in the Middle Umbra. This is probably just another myth, but the Pattern Webs are real. So, for that matter, are the spirit spiders who weave them. Brave or crazy mages can follow these webs – even climb them to get from one Realm to another. But unless you feel like screaming "*Help meeeeeeeee!*" while some spider-god eats your face, I wouldn't recommend it.

Umbral Realms

As in the high Umbra, the Middle Umbra hosts a multitude of Realms: forest realms and factory realms, blasted wastes and ancient cities, and places where dinosaurs do indeed still rule the Earth. Potent legends create Mythic Realms, like Hy-Brasil, Dystopia, Olympus, and Kun Lun. Earthy afterlives like the Valhalla battlefields and cultural myths like the Antebellum South exist amongst the near-infinite Middle Umbra planes. As with the High Umbra, you can find places that would qualify as primal heavens or hells – not the conceptual embodiments of such regions, but the primordial fears and hopes behind them. Various entities carve out little homes in these Realms as well, and though they look more like pristine wilderness than temples, such regions have a lot in common with the Astral Umbra Courts.

In all but the most ravaged regions, Nature dominates these Realms. Monumental peaks, endless forests, unbroken deserts, titanic coastlines – this is Earth as it was before mankind fucked it up. Literally "in the spirit" of that destruction, you can also find industrial nightmares that make Gary, Indiana look like the Appalachian Trail. Witnessing such devastation, the rage of werewolves becomes easier to understand. The Middle Umbra echoes our origins and sins, reflecting our world's immortal soul.

The Aetherian Reaches and Anchorheads

As in the Astral Umbra, gargantuan mountains reach toward the sky. Unlike those superluminal Spires, though, these mountains must be scaled hand-and-foot unless you've got wings or some other means of flying. Beyond those peaks, there's a vast open sky, marked by rainbows and the glittering stars. This is the realm of Thunderbird, the *Aetherian Reaches* that have been called "the face of the soul of forever."

Through this boundless sky, cloud realms float and planets hover. It's said that the Courts of the Sun and Moon can be

reached by anyone with enough courage and insanity to try and ascend to such heights. Such travelers must rely on their own power to fly, however. Technology cannot work in the Aetherian Reaches. Jetpacks, planes, even guns and synthetic fabrics, all either refuse to function or fall to pieces and disappear here.

High in the skies, whirling vortices often spin in and out of existence. These *Anchorheads* link the Aetherian Reaches to the worlds beyond the Horizon – the Shade Realms, Shard Realms, and the Deep Umbra itself. A flying traveler could, if he timed his journey right, pass through an Anchorhead and ascend to these enigmatic Realms. As the saying goes, however, many try and few are chosen. What happens to the ones who *mis*time that trip is anyone's guess...

The Lower Umbra, Underworld of Death

And then, of course, there is *death*.

We are all mortal. Magick gives us the means to stall death, even undo its effects for a short time. All things, however, die eventually: gods, vampires, even ideas. And the Low Umbra is where dead things go when they pass beyond the Earthly plane.

As I've mentioned earlier, a living mage can enter the Shadowlands; magick gives us that much power, though at a fairly high cost. Beyond that entry, though, the Low Umbra remains mysterious, with many stories but very few conclusions other than the ultimate end of life itself.

Penumbral Shadowlands and the Shroud

The Vidare Mortem shows us a glimpse of the dead realms – a gloomy forecast of earthly mortality. Even for the living traveler, this view of the world seems rotten. Dead and dying leaves hang on spindly trees, trunks cracked with terminal malaise. Glass surfaces are smeared or shattered. Soil squirms with pale white maggots. Every building seems like a tenement, each door or window tilting crazily in its frame. There's no day or night in the Shadowlands – only Dark and Deeper Dark. The few faces you behold in this place are corpse-like, all too often showing the marks of their deaths.

Without either the proper magicks or an actual death, a living person might *see* the Shadowlands but couldn't *enter* them. I suspect that deeply morbid people, mages and Sleepers alike, live more in this Vidare Mortem than they would like. To truly step over – to pierce what's called *the Shroud*, Death's own Gauntlet – while still living requires special magicks with a heavy cost. I've mentioned the agama sojourn earlier, and though other groups – even the Technocracy – have different names for it, the essence of that Art is the same: a combination of Entropy, Life, and Spirit that few people can command. Haunted locations have thinner Shrouds too, where a living soul might temporarily cross over if she's desperate or unfortunate enough to try. I've even heard that vehicles occasionally traverse into this dimension – lost airliners and ghost ships and hell-bound trains. If that *is* true, though, the effects on their crews and passengers must have been horrific indeed.

As always, there's that Penumbral mist, as if some mad stagehand went berserk with a smoke machine. It seems thicker in the Shadowlands, though... and terribly *alive*. That perpetual fog feels uncannily organic, too, like vaporized flesh. And the sounds you'll hear, if you stop to listen, might be the most disturbing things of all.

Why would anyone visit this place? Why would someone *want* to? I suspect it has a lot to do with a simple yet unnerving truth: *everything that lives is dying too*. And to visit this realm is to see that truth head on, without comforting illusions.

Future Fates: The Spirit-Nuke

In the Reckoning metaplot, a Void Engineer named Xerxes Jones piloted a specially designed Umbraship into the Shadowlands around 1999. His trip coincided with an Underworld war that apparently involved the spiritual reflections of Earthly nukes. When Xerxes dropped his experimental spirit-nuke into the Tempest, the combined detonation raised a titanic Maelstrom that tore much of the Underworld apart. This act, in turn, caused the Avatar Storm. The fate of that ship and its crew remain unknown.

Depending upon the Storyteller's wishes:

- **The Maelstrom remains:** The Shadowlands and Dark Kingdoms have been obliterated. The Low Umbra is one big storm, and passing into it means annihilation.
- **The Shadowlands and Dark Cities have been rebuilt:** The passing years have calmed the storm and allowed new wraiths to construct Underworlds from their own passions and the memories of recent events. Ground Zero in New York, for example, might have a spectacularly gruesome City of the Dead, perpetually burning and exploding in an endless horror show.
- **The spirit nuke incident never happened:** The Shadowlands, Stygia, and other Dark Empires remain as they're presented throughout the **Wraith: The Oblivion** series. And for updated possibilities, check out **Wraith: The Oblivion 20th Anniversary Edition**.

The death-mages I've known embrace this truth. It's part of their Awakened Path. To recognize mortality first hand, I'm told, is oddly liberating. Just as old-school shamans, ascetic mystics, or Ecstatic mages of the Left-Hand Path will "die to themselves" in order to be reborn, these death-mages find deeper understanding when confronting the most awful aspect of life's cycle. Out of birth comes life; out of life comes death; out of death comes rebirth. This is the cycle of Earthly existence. Pain is inevitable, but *suffering* is a choice. By confronting the Shadowlands in person, a mage chooses suffering in order to understand – and transcend – the inevitable pain of life.

And if that sounds gloomy... well, the Low Umbra is gloom personified.

The Tempest

Existing in a parallel space within the Shadowlands, there's a monumental storm: *the Tempest*. Essentially the embodiment of passion, memory, and mortality, it whirls through the basement of our Earthly cosmos. This, I'm told, is Entropy itself – an eternal vortex that draws all things into itself eventually. The Tempest occasionally rips through to the Shadowlands, manifesting in lesser storms called *Maelstroms* that can transport a soul to another destination or – more likely – rip it to shreds.

Dark Mysteries

As with the High and Middle Umbrae, the Tempest houses a multitude of Realms: Dark Kingdoms, hellholes, the dens of powerful entities, and the refuges of souls considered lucky by the standards of this region. According to death-mage lore, ghosts forge so-called *Necropoli* upon islands in the Tempest. Beyond these Dark Kingdoms – which are built, from what I'm told, out of crafted souls – there's a titanic Labyrinth chewed out of the Maelstrom itself by monsters that might have once been human. At the center of that cyclopean maze, legends say, there's a Void... *THE Void*, called by some folks *the Great Unmaking*. This gateway to Oblivion is the punch line to our cosmic joke. All that is, was, or ever aspired to be gets swept into the Void eventually and becomes nothingness once more.

Oddly enough, certain mystics consider that a comforting thought. If everything *ends* in a Void, then everything must come from that Void as well. The Universe *can't* be an endless flow of water going down the drain; eventually, that water – all matter, all energy, all potential – must get cycled back again. Just as living bodies break down into soil, so the new lives spring nurtured from that soil. And so, by that reasoning, the Void is our metaphysical recycling program, from which all new things come.

There's just one problem with that thought: maybe the Universe *isn't* endless. Perhaps a finite amount of energy, matter, and potential exists... and it's literally spilling away. Whether you call such speculations "the heat-death of the Universe" or some more mystic name, there are theories that speculate that we really *are* going down the drain. That this life is *everything*, and after it comes *nothingness*. Forever.

And that, perhaps, is where the Nephandi draw their inspiration from. Not from Ascension, but from Oblivion.

Comforting thought, isn't it?

Zones

Stepping away from such gloomy ruminations, I want to talk about dreams. *Literal* dreams, the dreams that Realms are made of. Fleeting pieces of our vast cosmic puzzle, the *Zones* drift through all three Worlds without belonging to any of them. Like the Tempest, these regions exist in a sort of hyperspace – separate yet bridgeable. And for Awakened and unAwakened souls, these Zones slip in around the edges and occasionally occupy an aspect of reality.

I mentioned the Null Zone earlier; the other Zones, as they're commonly defined, have been divided in the following ways:

Maya, the Dream Zone

These are such stuff as dreams are made on, and their reality is rounded by our sleep. As usual, mages debate whether the *Maya* – "the illusion of life" – predates humanity and therefore shapes us or whether it was the dreaming minds of our ancestors that first brought this Zone into being. A few people even assert that our Earthly reality is the *true* Maya, the *Matrix*-like shared dream/ nightmare that only *seems* real to us, and that the Dream Zone is where Reality *actually* resides. The old Zen joke about a man dreaming he's a butterfly who may truly be a butterfly dreaming he's a man... that's the essence of such puzzles. Once again, Chicken, meet Egg – now try not to break yourself figuring out who came first!

Like all Zones, the Maya exists independently of the three Worlds, the mortal plane, and the other Zones. Bits of it cross over for brief moments, but the place itself exists on its own terms. It's tempting to think of it as an outgrowth of either the High or Middle Umbra, and some authorities see it that way. More often, though, cosmologists consider it a region with its own metaphysical laws. Although powerful dreams are said to expand into the Mythic Realms of the Middle Umbra or the Afterworlds and Courts of the High Umbra, most of them exist in the ephemeral fabric of their own Zone.

Travel, Faeries, and Control

Unlike most of the Otherworlds, you probably won't be able to step sideways into the Maya; certain shamanic traditions, mostly among the Australian Aborigines, *do* teach their members how to do that, but it's a rather obscure art. Skilled astral travelers can project themselves into the Dream Zone too... often into other people's dreams; once again, though, that's a very specialized trick.

The fae-folk supposedly share a common tie to the Dream Zone, which they refer to as *The Dreaming*. The realm of changeling magic, their vision of that Dreaming consists of a *Near Dreaming* – essentially the Dream Penumbra – and the *Far Dreaming*, which resembles an obscure version of the Middle Umbra... and might, in fact, be part of it. Most of us, however, enter the Maya almost every time we sleep. The Dream Zone, you see, is the place where dreams take form, exist for short periods of time, and then pop like bubbles when the dreamer wakes.

Normally, a Dream Realm controls your reality; like a puppet, you're at the mercy of its whims. Taking control of your experience involves the technique called *lucid dreaming* – that thing you do when you recognize that you're in a dream and so decide to work it to your advantage. In a way, this is a lot like magic itself – you awaken to the idea that you can change reality to suit you. Oddly enough, plenty of mages never understand this element of a Dream Zone journey; it's like their conscious mind is so *used* to changing reality that it craves a place where it can surrender control. As any dreamer knows, however, the most pleasant dream can flip over, without warning, into nightmare territory. And if you find yourself running from a Freddy Krueger rip-off, it's comforting to know you can take control away from him if you're smart and brave enough to do so.

Demesnes: Your Personal Dream Kingdom

A very few dreamers manage to craft personal domains among the Dream Realms – places where the dreamer can return again and again, retaining a form of control over his domain. Sometimes known as a *Demesne* (a manor or estate, named from the same French root that gave us *domain*), this dream world takes cues from the subconscious desires and fears of its creator. If that dreamer realizes that he's got "his own private Idaho" to retreat to when he sleeps, this Demesne can become a sort of refuge. If he's not careful, though – or if he falls into a coma or a very deep Quiet – that Demesne can become a trap as well.

Lasting Realms and Dreaming Gods

There are supposedly more permanent Realms among the Dream Zone, too: the collective dreamscapes of cultural memory, like Hollywood, the Land of Nod, and the fearsome Dream Theatre of the Dead. Or like the primordial *Onerae*, where comatose and demented people spend their entire lives.

Dream Lord entities, the *Oneira*, make their homes among these regions, shaping dream-stuff into powerful Demesnes. Given the relationship between the Onerae and insanity, it's not unreasonable to assume that the deranged Marauder mages share a cosmic tie with the Oneira. When the Mad Ones disappear into vortices of their own insanity, they might even *become* Dream Lords within the Onerae. Perhaps this is what Ascension *is* to them... in which case, some Marauders essentially become gods.

Midrealm and The Aelder Bole

At the center of all things, it is said, there's a Realm that is All Realms and yet part of none of them. A primal expanse of virgin wilderness, it reaches to the borders of the High, Middle, and Low Worlds, branches into dreams, winds around the Paths of the Wyck, and pokes tendrils into the furthest corners of the Digital Web. This is the Ur-Forest, supposedly the origin of all forests everywhere. Legends call it *Eden*, *Paradise*, *Midrealm*, *the Root of Creation*. And at its center grows the largest tree in the universe: the *Aelder Bole*, a World Tree that reflects the majesty of life itself.

Ringed by a wall of rainbows that few travelers – and *no* technology – can pierce, Midrealm features four eternal rivers. Each one begins at the base of the World Tree and then ranges off into the distance, pointing almost exactly along the four axes of North, South, East, and West. In between those rivers, various biomes – forests, glades, wetlands, meadows, plains, and even deserts and ice – divide Midrealm into every earthly environment.

The Tree itself, a titanic pillar that reaches beyond the clouds, has been called by many names: the Tree of Life; the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; or the dense embodiment of the *Otz Chaim*, which traces the 10 Sephiroth that lead from the Divine Crown to Earthly Matter and back again. In the Tree's branches, a Protean Hawk guards the secrets of the immortal fruit of the Tree; under its roots, the serpent-dragon Typhon – said to be seven miles long – creeps through endless burrows dug beneath the surface of Midrealm. A Hall of Many Meetings, shaped from living wood, greets visitors who have a purpose; the titan Forethought hangs from a bough in a copse of oaks and pine trees, his blood nourishing the soil beneath his body. Some folks see Forethought as Odin; others view him as Christ. By any name, he embodies the Hanged Man, drawn between planes of existence and sacrificed to himself in the name of wisdom.

Some folks have tried to climb the World Tree. That's no easy task. Few travelers can even *find* Midrealm, much less enter it, and so although various legends speak of journeys up the World Tree, I've yet to meet anyone who could prove he'd actually performed that feat.

Mount Qaf

Certain legends claim that the Center of All Things is a *mountain*, not a *tree*. Known as *Olympus*, *Qaf*, or *Meru*, this Mountain dwarfs every Earthly mountain put together. Again, a vast wilderness radiates outward from the Mountain; sometimes it's a desert, other times a forest, and still other times a rocky plain or an expanse of ice. In the slippery metaphysics of the Worlds Beyond, this appears to be *essentially the same place* as Midrealm and the Aelder Bole. Is it human imagination that shifts these landscapes, or are principles beyond human consciousness at work here? I'm afraid there are no simple answers to that question. It's one of the many ineffable mysteries of the Awakened world.

The Mirror Zone

I'm sure you've had those moments in your life when expectations turned themselves inside out. Folks you'd thought were friends suddenly did things that seemed wildly out of character. What *had* been safe turned hazardous. "Evil twins" appeared to replace people you'd grown to trust... perhaps including you. Welcome to the *Mirror Zone*, in which things you had come to expect are inexplicably inverted.

You don't go to the Mirror Zone. The Mirror Zones comes to you... usually, but not *always*, in the Otherworlds. It isn't so much a parallel world so much as it appears to be composed of short-lived delusions straight out of your own mind. Some folks argue that it's not a Zone at all but a collection of astral manifestations that come about because we have issues to resolve. In plain English, you could say these mirrors pop in and out of existence because we need to work some shit out.

A Mirror Zone trip begins when you notice things out of place; someone you thought was dead is alive, old rivals start fucking right before your eyes – that sort of thing. Maybe *other people* notice something odd about *you*, crediting or blaming you for things you know you didn't do. Eventually, you come to realize that these incidents are tied to unresolved baggage. If and when you face up to your issues, the Mirror visit fades.

The Mirror Zone manifests most often in the High and Middle Umbrae, probably because of their cosmic ties to the imagination. Ghosts, I'm told, can face such manifestations too – harrowing encounters with the shadowy sides of their personalities. And, as I mentioned a moment ago, encounters with the Zone can happen in mortal reality too. If and when your world suddenly flips over, you might be facing some issues in the Mirror Zone.

Paradox Realms

Remember what I said earlier about Paradox and Thunderdome? Two realities enter, one reality leaves. If a mage oversteps his bounds, Reality sometimes reaches out, swallows him down, and sticks him in "reality jail." That's what *Paradox Realms* are: cosmic bubbles caused by metaphysical hiccups. The mage gets pulled out of his surroundings and stuck inside a bubble until he serves his time or manages to escape.

Like dreams, Paradox Realms are personal. No two of them are ever the same. Shaped not by Nature or gods but by the acts of magick that conjure them, these cosmic prisons pop into being around an offending mage and then suck him out to where his paradox causes less of a crisis than it had been causing before. Junior gets a time-out and the rest of the world moves on. Whether or not the mage moves on after that depends on whether he's willing to figure out what he did wrong. Folks who think that Reality is neutral – or that it lacks a sense of humor – have yet to visit a Paradox Realm.

Entering and Leaving

Assuming you're the mage in question, getting into a Paradox Realm is easy – getting *out* again is the trick. Generally,

this involves serious soul-searching and a form of penance, perhaps something as simple as a sincere "I'm sorry" to the Universe at large.

Getting into one if you're *not* the mage who caused that paradox is far more challenging. First off, you'll have to find the right one… which, if you're looking for a buddy's Paradox Realm, is fairly difficult. These Realms can resemble soap bubbles or sparkling holiday ornaments scattered across the shell of the Horizon or floating in the distant reaches of the Aetherian Reaches or Epiphamies. Once you find the right Realm (assuming that you can), there's the puzzle involved in opening the door. You see, there *isn't* one… and because every Paradox Realm is different, each Realm has a different means of entrance and exit. You might find yourself singing nursery rhymes backwards, kissing a winged pig, or speaking a familiar spell in a different language before the Realm lets you in. One thing's constant, though: each Realm, without fail, is based upon the magick that brought it into being. If you can figure out *why* a given Realm exists, then you'll have a key to freeing its prisoner.

Getting free one way or another is important with a Paradox Realm. Eventually, Reality gets tired of having such things around… and, like bubbles off the inner surface of a glass, they float away. To *where?* Into the Deep Umbra, that's where. And once *that* happens, the chance of getting free on your own power disappears. Unless someone finds you and sets you free, you're stuck with the results of your own Paradox… possibly forever.

The Hollow Earth

Paradox Realms aren't the only places where time stands still. Remember when I mentioned dinosaurs? Yes, they still roam free in a place known as *the Hollow Earth*: a strange inner Umbra that supposedly rests on the *inside* of the Earthly world.

Known by a variety of names, this region has been spoken of for millennia. It's the Land Beyond the Edge of the World, the Inner Earth, Hyperboria, Annwyn, Underhill. Whereas most cosmologists place the Umbrae *outside* the mortal realm, tales place the Hollow Earth under the crust or oceans of our world. Tunnels, whirlpools, caves, and rabbit holes lead into this region, supposedly without a need to step sideways over a Gauntlet; that gauntlet, in this case, is the edge of the everyday world. For obvious reasons, it's really bloody difficult to locate Hollow Earth passageways. Especially in our age of satellite cameras and GPS tracking, those "edges of the known world" are difficult to find… in order to find the Hollow Earth, you must first get seriously *lost*.

Etherites and Engineers

Two groups in particular have focused on finding the Hollow Earth: the Society of Ether and the Technocratic Void Engineers. The first group wants to explore it, and the second wants to seal it up forever. For obvious reasons, this place is dangerous – not only because it's too random for an ordered world but because hidden, often *forbidden*, knowledge, tends to wind up there. Before and during World War II, a group called *the Thule Gesellschaft* tried to bolster the Nazi forces with secrets from the Hollow Earth. Supposedly, a combined effort between the VEs and the Etherites managed to quash that effort, though with high costs to all parties involved. The nature of those secrets remains… well, *secret*. The archives of both groups, it's said, contain stories of lost races, amazing adventures, and things best left beyond the reach of mortal men.

The Digital Web

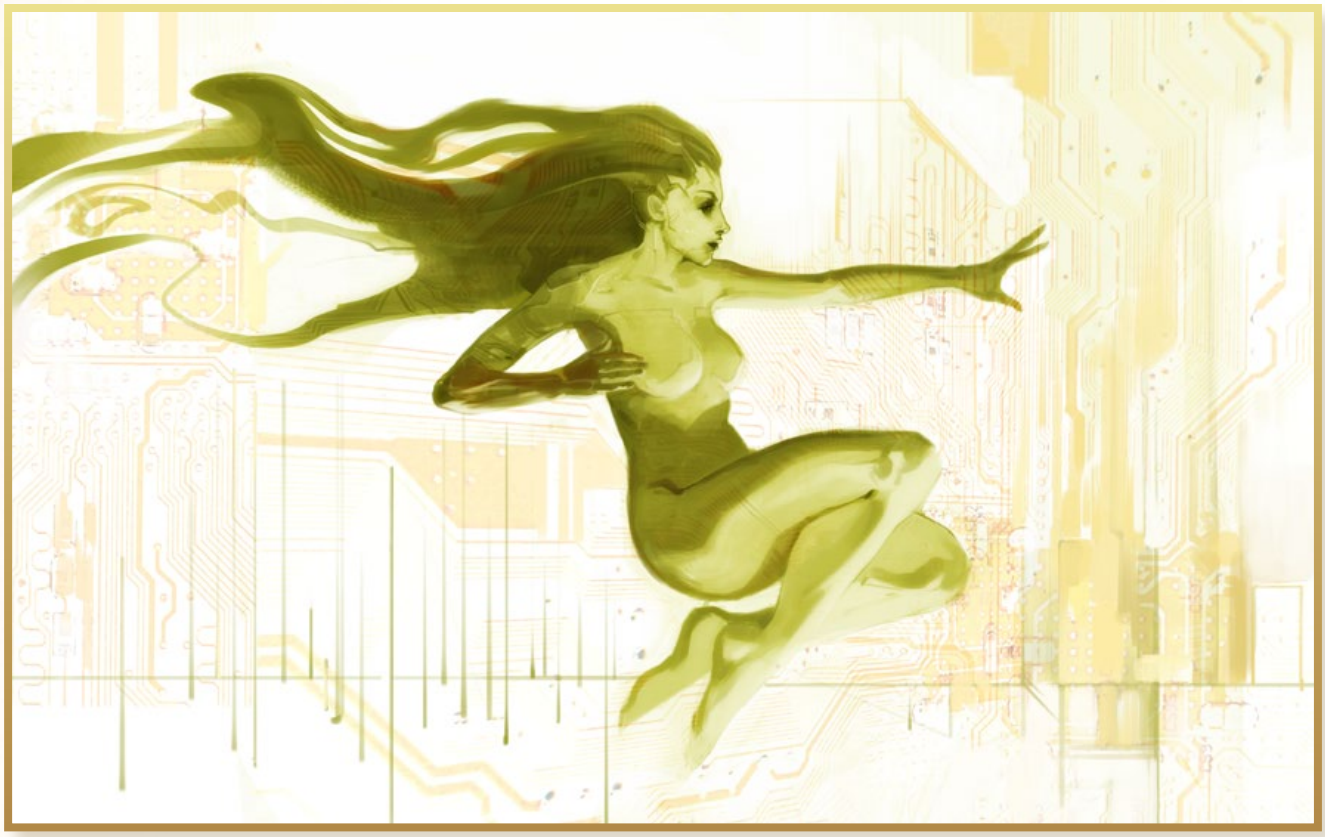
And then there's the Zone that remained an esoteric secret until recently but has since become a fulcrum for the mortal world: *the Digital Web*, a metaphysical reflection of the Internet. As theoretically boundless as the human imagination, this region began as a hazy, unformatted sector fading in and out of existence. Within the last few decades, though, it's swelled to a point where even its most dedicated travelers don't know where… or *if*… it ever ends.

Thinking Makes It So

Physically speaking, the Digital Web is *virtual space*: a level of reality defined strictly by consciousness. It's the *there* when "there" is a state unrelated to physical proximity. Folks used to think that reality was what you could see and hear and touch – a state defined by physical presence. Telephones and the Internet shattered that idea. Now you can share very "real" experiences – a friendship, a romance, an argument – with people with whom you never *have* shared, nor *will you ever* share, physical space. It's a state of reality that affects your life in ways that have nothing to do with physical existence. And if you have to ask whether virtual reality is *actually* real, just try counting the lumps of gold in your bank account and then ask that question again.

(Money itself is another form of virtual reality, but I won't muddy the waters by going *there* just yet…)

Virtual reality is defined only by consciousness – by a thinking mind's ability to perceive, process, draw conclusions, and adjust beliefs based upon nothing except mental activities. I could get all esoteric and argue that *all* reality is virtual reality, but I'll save *that* lecture for another time. In the Digital Web, several forms of astral projection send the traveler's consciousness into this virtual reality, typically leaving the physical body, or "meat," behind at home. All elements of reality in that space, therefore, are products of the traveler's consciousness.



For this reason, among others, the Digital Web – which is neither digital nor a web – exists in a state outside of the other Otherworldly Realms, and yet it overlaps almost every one of them. Even more than any other form of reality, it's all in the mind. It's not quite the High Umbra; nature and death are intrinsic parts of it as well. On a lot of levels, the Digital Web is the ultimate magickal domain... a fact that its pioneers tried, unsuccessfully, to keep to themselves.

Where Did This Come From?

In the beginning was the Mount, and the Mount was Qaf. And though Mount Qaf was said to occupy the center of all existence – as I mentioned earlier – almost no one knew it was there. You could reach this place only in your mind. A handful of mystics who would eventually form the Tradition called the *Ahl-i-Batin* recognized the significance of Mount Qaf, and they safeguarded the secret from common men. Millennia passed, and a world grew across the fringes of Mount Qaf. Eluding almost everyone, however, was the *importance* of Mount Qaf – the mountain standing at the center of everything and yet existing nowhere.

It's been said that early experiments in virtual reality – telepathy, prophecy, remote-viewing magicks like crystal balls and scrying pools – all touched upon the fabric of this Web. Some philosophers even speculate that books constitute a form of virtual reality. It took the invention of the telephone, however, to break through to the virtual space dominated by Mount Qaf and its surroundings. When people could hear the words of a person in one physical location reach across space to be heard in another one, the obvious conclusion appeared: the parties were meeting somewhere between the two of them. And from there, the *real* fun began...

Flatlands

Unlike the primordial enigmas that constitute the Three Worlds, the Digital Web as we know it has a verifiable history; in several cases, the Zone's pioneers are still alive today. The primary founder, however, perished from the Earthly plane, if not from existence, in the process of opening this grand can of worms. Computer genius Alan Turing, revered as an Archmaster by the Virtual Adepts who dominate the Web, created the esoteric computations that allowed him to access this space. Reputedly assassinated (a so-called "suicide" in mortal histories) in the middle of a grand experiment, Turing is said to have either opened, created, or been sucked into the Digital Web in 1954. Whatever it is that actually occurred that day, the virtual frontier literally started with a bang.

In its earliest days, the Web is said to have been composed of text and fog, drifts of typewriter-font words drifting or darting across a dark void of luminescent mist. According to certain Web-historians, even that mist was formed of code – glowing strings of numerals and symbols drawn from all human languages, bound together by the odd alchemy of

human thought. Rigid geometric patterns – perhaps reflecting the Platonic solids in a new configuration – soon followed the discovery of this space, with bold colors and angular shapes replacing the original environment.

During its transition from code-fogs and bright geometry to the Zone's current state, the Digital Web went through a phase right out of Heavy Metal Magazine. Bizarre sectors, comic-book physics, bright colors, and more testosterone-fueled perversity than should be allowed to exist in one space, all flourished from the late '70s to the mid-'90s. A circular trade-off between Web reality and popular sci-fi crafted the visions of both. By the late '90s, though, a combination of sophisticated Computer Graphics Imaging, increased net traffic, and the combined imaginations of Sleepers and Awakened had turned the *Tron*-like cyberscape into a lush electronic world.

These days, a trip to the Digital Web brings you into a hyperreal multiverse of rich vistas and startling colors. Although it's still bolder and often louder than the mortal realm, there's a sensual sophistication that was lacking, perhaps impossible, in the older Web. As with the Three Worlds, the Web reverberates with vivid sensations. And yet there's a lingering *flatness* to it all, especially when compared to the primal impressions of the Three Worlds. Most of the Web feels like a pyrokinetic bazaar, but for all the sound and fury and polymorphous culture, there's something missing.

It's *scent*. The Digital Web doesn't *smell* like anything. Taste is oddly lacking too – not just in the aesthetic sense, but in the *sensory* sense. As vivid as the sights and sounds and even tactile impressions can be, the Digital Web still falls a bit short of full satisfaction as far as the human animal is concerned. That said, considering how ripe certain netizens probably are in person, that missing sense might not be an entirely bad thing.

Techgnosis and Transhumanism

Given its escape from physical constraints, the Web has nurtured a growing movement toward *transhumanism*: the ideology in which human consciousness transcends our animal limitations. Like many philosophies, transhumanism comes in lots of flavors, including genderfuckers and identity nomads who sidestep conventional social norms, posthumanist flesh-jockeys angling for the next stage of human evolution, and the "escape key" variety that believes that we'll all be better off when we upload ourselves into Reality 2.0. A thick strain of *Gnosticism* – that ancient belief that we exist in a corrupt world but can transcend it through arcane knowledge – runs through Digital Web society. From Virtual Adept technomystics to the hard-headed Technocrats of Iteration X, many groups within the Web see it as the back door out of physical reality... a self-booting Rapture, if you will, that leaves the mortal world behind.

As usual, people wind up fighting about doctrine and territory. And predictably, the opening of virtual space sparked a reality race that parallels the Ascension War. Just as mortal mystics and Technocrats battle to decide the fate of Meatspace, so their uploaded counterparts have slugged it out in the Digital Web – often with more civility and mutual respect, but with no less determination to win the future for their side.

Over the last 50 years, and especially within the last 20, the great race to claim virtual space has picked up speed. Like all wars – and on many levels, it *has* been a war – that race spurs new technologies. Now, any number of mages will tell you that *their* faction-of-choice created personal computers, ARPANET, icon-based interfaces, or even Facebook. Whatever. The undeniable truth is that the Digital Web has grown, since the early 1990s, from an elite playground to a foundation of the human world. And like all growth spurts, that has involved a fair amount of pain.

Whiteout

The greatest pain in this virtual world remains the spectre of *Whiteout*. Essentially a reality crash, Whiteout occurs when the strands of the Web, if you will, get twisted or broken by carelessness. Just as power surges or viruses can disrupt or destroy computer systems, so a Whiteout disrupts localized Webspace. In late 1997, one literally crashed the entire Digital Web, killing dozens, if not hundreds, of travelers and injuring many more. Linked to the destruction of Doissetep, this colossal Whiteout was the worst of its kind thus far. Fears of a similar event at the end of 1999 didn't pan out, thank the many gods, but long-time netizens keep watching over their shoulders. The Internet, after all, has undergone vast changes in the physical world; the fact that events in that world can still affect Reality 2.0 is rarely far from anyone's mind.

These days, the Digital Web is neither the Wild West it once was nor the Reality 2.0 its idealists hoped it would be. The amusing and often tiresome leetspeak that once defined it has given way (again, thank all the gods that be) to a highly visual, mixed literacy defined by text, graphics, links, video, and shared points of reference. Even now, though, there's a vast gulf between the people who use the Internet and the folks who truly *live* in virtual reality. You probably do the first thing every day, but you might never do the second thing in your life.

Internal Access

Any conscious entity can dream; very few, however, can enter the Dream Zone under their own power and then walk around there at will. The Digital Web works the same way. Billions of people access virtual space every day, via phones and keyboards. These folks don't actually *enter* the Digital Web, though – they skim along its proximity, brushing its strands the way that insect wings displace the air. As Sleepers do in the magickal realm, most people affect the nature of Reality as a whole yet rarely work their Will upon it. They pass briefly through the virtual realm, fireflies flashing here and there. To become human in that region, you've got to send yourself there through one of several methods:

- **Sensory visitation** involves projecting an enhanced version of your consciousness into virtual space. Using VR gear,

Future Fates: Cell Phones and the Internet

When **Mage** appeared in 1993, the Internet barely existed. A mere handful of people had even *heard* of it, and fewer still knew how to access it. Since then, the Internet has become a cornerstone of the world as we know it. In the new millennium, that Internet connects the human world in ways that seemed impossible around 1993. By 2013 – thanks to cell phones and wireless Ethernet (neither of which existed in 1993) – net access is pocket-sized and portable. With rare exceptions, anyone in the industrialized world can reach it whenever they want to.

This makes a *huge* difference for certain elements of **Mage: The Ascension**.

A wired world is a more *knowledgeable* world, for starters, with access to a theoretically infinite collection of information; that information is far more consistent and accurate than it was in the 1990s... and often more entertaining, too. Between cell phones and online social media, there's more connection and less solitude. People can compare notes from across the world, plan flash mobs, expose police brutality, stage protests, and spread the word about anything from political corruption to grumpy cats. It's hard to hide in this world, and most folks don't seem to *want* to. On some levels, this is the Virtual Adepts' dream fulfilled.

And yet, cell phones and the Internet trivialize things too. When *everything's* accessible, it all seems less *special*. By 2014, many folks suffer from information overload, over-familiarity, and a circular obsession with online distractions. These new technologies flatten social interactions as well. You can have friends in Greece yet never see the folks next door. If you live in the industrialized world, you don't need to be a dungeon troll in order to spend most of your life online. A paradoxical sense of connected alienation seeps into many relationships, in which partners argue with strangers while ignoring the person beside them. Self-centered outrage trumps social interaction. Sexism, racism, and all manner of social grotesquerie pour from social media communities where bizarre forms of intimate sociopathy manifest as real-world brutality and terroristic "pranks." With the world at our fingertips, it seems to slip through our hands.

Whose ideal world is *this*? It's too unpredictable for the Technocracy, too brutish for the Virtual Adepts, too trivial for the Society of Ether, and too banal for many Awakened folks. Yet it *is* magickal in every way that matters. Who's behind it all? And do you even *want* this crap cluttering up your **Mage: The Ascension** world?

A **Mage 20** Storyteller has several options:

- **Your story takes place in the 21st century, with current Internet and cell phone technology:** Adjusting the influence and abilities of the Virtual Adepts and other factions, you run your chronicle amidst the familiar trappings of the ever-wired world.
- **Your story takes place in the 1990s, before things take their current shape:** Your retro chronicle employs the limited Internet and technologies of the "classic **Mage**" era. Things may or may not eventually take their present form, depending on your chronicle's events.
- **Your story takes place in an alternate present:** Like a Quentin Tarantino movie, your chronicle plays out against a backdrop that mixes decades and trappings in whatever way you please. Retro elements mingle with up-to-date technologies; the Crips and Bloods have Facebook pages; Nine Inch Nails still sounds cutting-edge, and folks can use terms like "cutting-edge" without wincing. You might use your cell phone to patch into the Digital Web, but the format of that Web is still up for grabs.

It's *your* chronicle. Incorporate the Internet, cell phones, and the influence of both in whatever ways seem best for you and your troupe.

Chapter Nine features an extensive section dealing with the Digital Web. For more details about the late-'90s Internet, see **Digital Web 2.0**.

you achieve a clumsy sort of presence in the Web. It's safe but awkward. Despite refinements of VR gear over the last few decades, this method is still like trying to play ping-pong in a hazmat suit.

- **Astral immersion** sends your consciousness into the Web while fooling your senses with an illusion of virtual space. Essentially, it employs a scientific truth: *everything you experience consists of electrical impulses sent through your sensory organs and into your brain, where your brain perceives them as reality*. Astral immersion allows a person to perceive astral reality (in the Web, at least) without being a master of astral projection... which is helpful for folks without the time or training to achieve such expertise. It's more dangerous than sensory visitation because it's more real. That said, it's still less risky than...
- **Holistic immersion**, in which a traveler downloads himself into the virtual realm as living information. This is easier now than it once was, but it remains a powerful act of magickal technology. For travelers, this is the most dangerous type of journey, for though sensory and astral

trips leave the meat at home, holistic immersion brings the whole of one's self into the Web. What happens to you there happens to you on all levels of Reality.

- **Web-Climbing**, a laborious trip, remains an art few mages ever learn. Scaling the Pattern Web between Otherworlds, a traveler can holistically enter the Digital Web without using technology at all. Despite this apparent convenience, however, it's a rough option to employ. For starters, you've got to *find* the Pattern Webs leading into the Digital Web... and then, you've got to be able to climb there. I'm told that werewolves can do this sort of thing, but mages are not werewolves. Hardy shamans might be able to accomplish this task, but it'd take a fit and crazy mage to dare that sort of climb. One slip or hesitation along the way, and *who knows* where you'd end up...?

Mind Matters, Icons, and Avatars

In both sensory and astral modes, a Web visitor employers her *mind*, not her *body*, in order to get results; because her traveling form is shaped entirely by consciousness, not matter, her meat means nothing here. You can be a standard-issue dungeon troll back in Meatspace yet look like Milla Jovovich's hotter sister in the Web. Appearance, in the Digital Web, is most often whatever travelers want it to be.

Although holistic and Web-climbing visitors bring their physical selves into virtual space, the majority of people who spend time here remake themselves through the power of imagination. In truth, *any* traveler in virtual space can do the same thing – even physical bodies are made of information here, and information can be adjusted. Essentially, you can remix your appearance when you're in the Web. All it takes is some imagination and – in all but the Web-climbing cases – a bit of computer skill.

Adopting small-"a" avatars called *icons*, netizens create the forms and faces they want to have. You could be an idealized version of yourself, a cartoon character, a puff of purple smoke, or whatever else you might want to become. It's a lot like the video and computer games that let you customize your avatar to suit your tastes... and because so many netizens from the current generation grew up playing those games, the wild variety of older icons has given way, in most cases, to standardized arrays of customizable humanoid icons that look a lot like characters out of *World of Woecraft*, *Rock Hero,* or *Grand Steal Auto*. The graphics are better these days than they used to be, but the imagination quotient has dropped through the floor.

Thanks to Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games, folks these days are used to the icon concept. Even Sleepers accept the idea of making a new self and identifying yourself as a Blood-Elf, Tauren, or badass war-panda. The powerful sense of identification between someone's meat and her online persona has made it fairly easy for online gamers to project parts of their consciousness online. Thanks to popular media, it's also easy for them to imagine themselves as characters in a vast Matrix of virtual reality. In a perverse twist of fate, Technocratic toys have opened doorways of magical potential. Computers and the Internet have become indispensible elements of techno-culture, but that culture reverberates with magical – and magi*ckal*– ideas.

As I said, the Digital Web is a realm of pure consciousness. A traveler's mind is her ultimate tool. A brawny, stupid dude is dead meat, so to speak, in this realm, whereas his nerdy Meatspace punching bag can become a virtual Terminator. In the Digital Web, wits and imagination, not agility and strength, make you all that you can be. No wonder it's been the Otherworld of choice for geeky mages for the last quarter-century or so!

Virgin, Formatted, and Corrupted Web

Like the Three Worlds, the Digital Web Zone is essentially infinite. Trying to map its ever-shifting expanse would be like trying to chart frost patterns on a window over the course of a winter – some spots last, most fade, and many of them overlap to form new patterns. That fractal comparison suits the Web as well; its reach is more like a cosmic god-net – a gleaming Indra's Net in which each strand offers reflections of the others – than like any mortal geography.

That said, the Digital Web's net-scape can be seen in three distinctly different forms:

- **Virgin Web** has yet to be set into form. Perceived as ghostly tendrils of uncanny pasta or cryptographic fog, such areas reflect the potential of virtual space. No matter how much the Web expands, there always seems to be virgin territory along its borders. According to theory, new users create new areas of Virgin Web because those newcomers have yet to feel they know its possibilities. So long as new folks join the Internet/ Digital Web experience, the theory goes, that Web will expand to accommodate them. If we ever reach a point at which everyone alive is online (an *extremely* unlikely event), then Virgin Web would probably disappear.

- **Formatted Web** springs up when someone claims Virgin Web. Spinning its potential into form, that Formatted Web becomes *sectors* (essentially websites) and *conduits* – corridors and teleportation pads that link those sectors together. The sectors themselves can be *Free* (for open access) or *Restricted* (with access closed except to certain protocols), with details as varied as the people who use them.

- **Corrupted Web** has been ruined by some disaster or abuse. Like a corrupted hard drive, such regions cannot be reformatted or employed – they can only be avoided. Avoiding them is a good idea, too. They're extremely disturbing. In Corrupted Web, the net-scape skews or flickers, its original contours warped with nightmarish

surreality. Rooms become razored mazes; conduits become neon spaghetti. Nothing is permanent, safe, or reliable, and although that might sound like a fun place for a romp, a Corrupted Sector hosts vicious critters and a definite threat of *de-resolution*... a.k.a., digital death.

Digital Death: The De-Rez

That death, incidentally, tends to be as permanent as your method of travel. De-rezing when you're in sensory visitation mode usually results in a headache and scattered perceptions but not much worse than that. An astral visitor gets those effects, plus – quite often – minor brain damage, physical burns, or both. A traveler who gets cacked while holistically immersed dies for real. The more you enter, the more you risk. And so, while the Digital Web offers opportunities to die another day, that death might one day prove permanent.

Sectors: Haunts, Constraints, and Grids

When Formatted or Corrupted regions have been shaped into sectors – the Realms within the Digital Web – those sectors assume a variety of forms:

Haunted Web

The most fearsome sectors feature literal ghosts in the machine. In places that have been corrupted by Whiteouts or malicious programs, that overlap with the Low Umbra, or that mark the site of a particularly nasty digital death, you might find such ghosts... or worse, become one yourself! *Haunts* are obvious; like Meatspace haunted houses, they feature ghostly phenomena, often acted out against a misty, ruined backdrop. Such places play ugly games with your mind... and because consciousness is *everything* in the Digital Web, those games can have nasty consequences.

More frightening still are the *Hung Sectors*, where metaphysical data stutters can trap unwary travelers and get them stuck, frozen or flickering, in potentially endless loops. And then there's *the Rip*: fractal storm-tides that are said to draw netizens into the *Trash Sector*, a legendary virtual hell of lost data and broken-code chaos. Some folks think that the Rip and the Trash Sector reflect the damnation of Alan Turing – making that Sector a virtual rock where the Prometheus of net-space gets eternally devoured for the hubris of opening it up to us. Others speculate that it's where data goes to die... and because everything is information, it's the ultimate fate of all things. An even cheerier theory posits that the Trash Sector is the demented side of virtual reality, the broken shell of its divine consciousness.

Oh, yeah – didn't I tell you? According to some theories, the Digital Web is alive... and it feeds on our life energies when we spend time in it – which, when you think about it, would explain a *lot* of things about the Internet age.

C-Sectors

To preserve what netizens build in this Zone, Formatted Sectors are typically *Constrained* – that is, set into certain forms by protocols that limit the possibilities within that sector. That process used to be anathema to many Virtual Adepts, who claimed that information needed to remain free, especially in virtual reality space. That idea, sadly, faded under the stress of conflict, division, and the incursion of *all those goddamned Sleepers* who could not and would not follow the plan. Even the most idealistic Adepts soon wound up Constraining private realms where only the most elite of them could go. As usual, meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

For a while, sectors that had been Formatted within certain protocols were called *Constraint Realms*, regions where visitors and their activities had to follow a certain theme. Folks who bridled at the term "constraint" preferred *configuration* instead. Eventually, the clunky phrase was streamlined into *C-Sector* (occasionally even into the grotesque pun "C-Section"), a term that's come to mean "any area configured to suit a given idea." And because almost *any* Formatted area is configured to suit a given idea – and, by extension, to exclude ideas that don't fit the creator's plans – C-Sector now refers to an area designed for a particular kind of use. Any type of sector that's been deliberately Formatted by netizens is essentially a C-Sector.

Under that huge umbrella, you've got *SRVRZ*, the highly-Restricted Technocratic strongholds; *FreeSpace*, which has ironically been Constrained to keep out everyone but the most idealistic transhumanists; a multitude of private *Saves* where netizens gather in exclusive company, shaping little reality rooms to suit their needs and fancies; *Coms* (or *ComGrounds*) like the legendary Spy's Demise, where folks from different factions can mingle in relative safety; and the massive Grid Sectors where the majority of the action, Awakened and otherwise, goes down...

Grids

Known dismissively as "sheep pens," those Grid Sectors get Formatted to keep the majority of Sleeper net traffic from clogging up the Digital Web at large. Originally seen as glowing grids of lines and typeface (hence, "grid"), many of these regions have since taken on the dreamlike texture of CGI artwork. Although quite a few of them – especially the ones denoting office environments, industrial information, and so forth – retain that grid-like appearance from a netspace view, others – particularly gaming zones, social networks, and art communities – feature graphics that Hollywood would kill for. As the theory goes, people invest themselves in the Web... and so, groups of people – even Sleepers – who spend lots of time and energy here are rewarded with more impressive realms.

Even now, the majority of websites on the Meatspace Internet are Grid Sectors. They can grow vast, but their reality is pretty Constrained. That's intentional. Grid Sectors have Restriction protocols that keep the majority of the sheep (sometimes known as *bleaters*) from wandering around and shitting all over Webspace. Awakened travelers can come and go easily enough, but it takes

a dedicated (or fortunate) Sleeper to hop the fence and go off elsewhere. By and large, folks don't even know they *can* go elsewhere; they ping from Grid to Grid, never realizing there's so much more to the Internet than the things they see on their screens.

Despite the original intent behind them, Grids make up the majority of shared space in the Digital Web. Sleepers and Awakened share company in such regions, where the Awakened netizens simply realize what's really going on. To Meatspace bleaters, these Grids combine text and graphics to create a computer interface. Awakened visitors, on the other hand, can walk through those spaces, interacting with people's icons as if they were sharing a room in Meatspace. Although the mortals interact through keyboards and headsets, visiting mages experience the Web as full-contact Reality.

As I've mentioned, virtual geography is changeable – now more so than ever before. The majority of Grid Sectors, though, include a variety of zones, including *Warzones*: gaming areas that are among the largest and most elaborate communities on the Web; *FaceSpace*, the various social media Grids, which look like tract housing made of pictures; the *Wharchives*, colossal libraries filled with ever-changing content; *Trawlers*, little virtual teleportation boats that skim the Web for information; *InfoSpace*, where blogs and newsfeeds appear as handbills with shifting text and illustrations, often flying around on virtual winds, getting stapled to posts, or being snapped up and slapped up with "sticky" glue to surfaces in other Grids; the Restricted *Salons* and *Galleries* where artists and bloggers meet and share their work with exclusive company; the *Dream Theatres*, where virtual memories play out for enthusiastic (and often obnoxious) audiences; *Echo Chambers*, where folks preach from virtual soapboxes and get swept up in amplified hysterias; the *Pleasure Zones*, drenched in cheesy sexuality for any taste imaginable; and many other Grids besides – all of them flickering with advertising space, flame wars, and the lambent glow of mortal egotism on a vast yet disconnected scale.

Icon-ogasm

"Sleepy" visitors can spend the better part of their lifetimes in the Grids. Embodied as ghostly icons with synthetic voices, these people drift throughout the Grids, acting out shadow-puppet reflections of the human experience. Their words tend to be clipped, slurred, or overly eloquent, depending on the typing speed and writing skill of the people on the other end of the icon. Quite often, they're an obnoxious, self-centered reminder of how far we are from global Utopia. Years ago, many Virtual Adepts claimed that Reality 2.0 would uplift the human animal. If the Grids provide examples of that theory, though, it's pretty hard to find. Although you can witness kindness and affection on the Grids, the *SCREAMING ALL-CAPS STUPIDITY* of many Grid-sheep makes for a disillusioning experience.

And yet, as in the mortal realm, there's still hope for us there on the Grid. For every racist, homophobic Echo Chamber fuck, there are charities and sympathies, hugging icons and old friends reunited on the Web. You'll find forgiveness and enlightenment and folks hooking up, sexually or otherwise, through shared interests and validations. The Grid Sectors provide cacophonous proof that humanity bounces between angels, apes, and assholes. We might be a long way from perfection, but it's not time to give up on us quite yet.

Awakened visitors have vivid icons with voices and behaviors that seem almost human. Astral immersion provides the most flexible experience, whereas holistic immersion and Web-climbing provide the most solid icons. Sensory visitation creates a hazy icon that's still more tangible than a Sleeper icon from the Grid. It sometimes takes a moment or two, but Awakened folks can often recognize each other's nature, if not identity, in the Web.

Identity is an elusive concept in this space. As I mentioned earlier, folks project aspects of their Earthly selves here, but those aspects can be deceptive. An icon might look nothing whatsoever like that person's physical self. Skilled netizens can appear in whatever form they choose. More often than not, you can guess a lot about a person in Meatspace by the way they behave. After all, appearances aren't *everything*. In the Digital Web, however, identity is fluid and often unpredictable. For bleaters and Awakened netizens alike, this Zone provides potent lessons about the tricky nature of reality.

The Horizon

There's a point of demarcation between what we know as reality and the vaster Reality beyond our world. And that point's often called *the Horizon*. A metaphysical membrane around the many layers of our Earth, it presents a second, thicker Gauntlet that insulates our world from outer space… and probably protects space from *us* as well.

Unlike the Earthly Gauntlet, you can't step through this wall unless you're skilled and powerful enough to try. Astral masters can project their consciousness beyond this point, and lucky travelers can fly through Anchorheads. Technologically inclined folks hop on rocket ships and blast through the planet's atmosphere, and the fortunate (or unfortunate) others employ portals to reach the Horizon and beyond.

Metaphysically speaking, the Horizon is a titanic wall around the Otherworlds – a shadow of the edge of material Earth's atmosphere. Whereas the air gets thin up there, however, the spirit barrier gets *thicker*. Appearing in the Middle Umbra

Future Fates: The Horizon War, Doissetep, and the Storm

As mentioned elsewhere, the **Mage** metaplot features several cataclysmic events. In the late '90s, the Ascension Warrior's crusade included Doissetep's demolition, several other devastated Horizon Realms, and a massive attack on the Tradition stronghold called *Horizon*. Followed by, perhaps even culminating in, the Technocratic disaster in the Underworld – and the resulting Avatar Storm – the majority of Horizon Realms were either destroyed outright or else cut off from Earth, doomed to drift into deep space forever.

Depending on the wishes of your troupe and Storyteller:

- **The Horizon Realms are history:** A handful of Realms still exist, but the majority of them perished. Ghost Realms float through Etherspace, acting out ephemeral extensions of their original forms. Even the Technocracy has been cut off from its offworld Constructs, and that disconnection has led to profound changes within the Union. For details, see ***The Technocratic Union*** in **Chapter Five** and the **Revised**-era **Convention Books** for the five Technocracy groups.
- **The mystic Realms were attacked but have recovered:** Despite a few nasty battles, the majority of mystic Realms survived and prospered while other Realms have grown. Perhaps mystic mages fled from Earth's Consensus (as described in **Mage 1st Edition**) and set up a multitude of Realms where they'll be safe from Technocratic persecution.
- **Ignore the metaplot:** Ascension Warrior *who?* Avatar *what?* There are as many Horizon Realms as you want there to be, with no attrition from metaplot concerns. Doissetep could be alive and well, and Horizon might remain a safe haven for Tradition mages everywhere. The fate of those worlds is whatever you want it to be.

For extensive, though rather dated, details about Horizon Realms, see **The Book of Chantries**, **Horizon: Stronghold of Hope**, **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds** (Chapter Four), **The Infinite Tapestry**, and the **Sorcerers Crusade** sourcebook **Castles and Covenants**.

as a rain- or moon-bow and in the High Umbra as the clouds atop the Spires, the Horizon has been called *the Dreamshell* – enclosing the dreams of humanity while sheltering us, perhaps, from the dreaming Void.

Because, you see, the Void *does* dream. By "Void," I don't mean the inner Void where souls get recycled in the Underworld, although *that* probably dreams as well. I'm referring to the Great Void of outer space, the fathomless reaches that stagger comprehension. Throughout most of human history, this was the place we could not go – the Vault of Heaven, the Firmament. In recent years, however, human beings have not just *observed* and *theorized about* the mysteries of outer space – we have pierced them. And in our dreams and nightmares, it comes to visit us as well.

The Traitor Copernicus?

Where did the Horizon come from? Was it *always* here, or did we dream it into being? Like so many enigmas, that's a matter of debate. Certain myths claim that all things were once One but got shattered by some monumental sin. Other theologies insist that the cosmos came about in a single, divine thunderbolt – a blast of God becoming Many and descending into fragments of Its Majestic Presence. We have Big Bangs both scientific and theological. What we *don't* have are definitive answers... if such answers, in a subjective cosmos, are even possible at all.

There's an old belief among certain mystic mages that Earth was once the center of the Universe. In those days, it's said, the Horizon was either weak or nonexistent. The various planets were just shadows in the sky – *Shard* and *Shade Realms* left over from a cosmic cataclysm. That myth still reverberates in the names Tradition mages use to describe the heavens. According to that belief, mages could pass from the Earth into outer space on huge *Skyrigger ships*, or they could grow wings and fly off to Mars or elsewhere. What we call space was limited, and it surrounded the Earth like a blanket or shell. And then, in the Renaissance, astronomers like Copernicus – who's reputed to have been a mage – claimed that impression was backwards. We were just a speck in an endless Void, a fragile spot of light in a sea of eternal darkness. And that claim, it's said, caused the Horizon to appear.

Personally, I think that's nonsense. For starters, Copernicus and his peers did not change human belief with a few strokes of their pens. It took centuries for what we call "the scientific worldview" to spread across humanity... and in many places it's *still* not the dominant belief. Secondly, the concept of the Earth in space has existed for thousands of years. The Mayans, the Babylonians, the Classical Greeks, and other cultures speculated about the boundless reaches of space long before Copernicus ever wrote his theories down. Astronomy has generally looked *outward*, not *inward*, from Earth's gravity. Still, *something* changed dramatically during the Renaissance. If nothing else, the growing voice of science shifted the balance of beliefs.

According to legends about that era, mages used to sail into the Void, breathing almost as easily as they could here on Earth. Now, of course, that's supposed to be impossible. The Technocratic Void Engineers – named for that infinite space – dress up in bulky suits and armor. And yet, mad Marauders

and Nephandic shock troops get spotted out in space wearing nothing more than body paint and crazy grins. Does their insanity protect them... or is it the space troopers who are the crazy ones? I haven't been there yet, so I'm not sure. Again, though, our Horizon marks a point of departure. Once past it, the old rules no longer apply.

Horizon Realms

Tucked into the Horizon, carved out of its metaphysical shell, are the legendary *Horizon Realms*. Shaped by powerful magicks (or advanced technology – your call), these pocket worlds are designed, like C-Sectors, to suit specific desires. Horizon Realm creators reweave the Tapestry in fundamental ways, changing what is and is not possible until the local reality meets with their approval.

I couldn't tell you when or how the first Horizon Realm was formed. No one really knows. I've heard theories that the cave complexes of Lascaux extended into the Otherworlds, shaping the original man-made Realm; I've also heard that the Pyramids, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Tower of Babel, Solomon's Temple, and the Yellow Emperor's Court were all either constructed within Horizon Realms or else extended into them. The European catacombs certainly reach into Horizon Realms; the Vatican is attached to at least one of them too, as are the Taj Mahal, the Forbidden City, the Tower of London, and – so I'm told – Grand Central Station. The World Trade Center is said to have been tied to a Horizon Realm, which would explain the odd pattern of its collapse. Such Realms can even be connected to movable anchors back on Earth. I've heard of vans, trains, and one or two real-life magic buses that opened into pocket Realms built to their owners' specifications.

Nodes, Portals, and Earthly Aspects

Each Horizon Realm – or, in Technocratic terms, Horizon *Construct* – must be forged with powerful magicks, fueled with Quintessence, attached to a Node, and connected to the mortal plane by pan-dimensional portals and earthly anchors, or *aspects*. These aspects hold clues to the connected Realm – stone walls, mystic sigils, sterile laboratories, or what-have-you – and literally keep the Horizon Realm grounded. Without these other elements, a Realm soon folds in upon itself or winds up cut off from the Earth and drifting away into deep space... a horrific fate that supposedly befell many Realms around the turn of the millennium.

There used to be dozens, perhaps hundreds, of Horizon Realms. Between the Ascension War, consensual belief, and the simple need to find safe space in an ever-growing world, mages of all kinds made Horizon Realms to fit their needs. As they discovered, though, such places are precarious. The more isolated you become – and the fewer doors you make in and out of your home – the easier it is to get cut off. And for some Horizon Realms, that's exactly what happened.

Ghost Realms

During the dust-ups a few years back, many portals slammed shut, Nodes were seized or destroyed, and Horizon Realms were severed from their Earthly ties. This proved catastrophic to the inhabitants of those Realms. The lucky ones escaped to spread nightmarish tales of Realms that folded up and sucked everyone and everything within the Realm to an unknown – but clearly uncomfortable – destiny. Some become those Ghost Realms I mentioned earlier – spectral reflections filled with Disembodied spirits who essentially believe they're still alive. The *most* unlucky people, I assume, either perished or wound up in some dimension we have yet to learn about. The results of this catastrophe tipped the balance of power in the Ascension War... and, more vitally, showed the true cost of what it is that we do. To be Awakened is to risk everything for a glimpse of self-made miracles. And sometimes, through little or no fault of our own, we find ourselves swallowed by forces beyond our control.

S.R.: The Shade Realms

Cast against the Horizon by the physical and metaphysical light of the Sun, the *Shade Realms* – once known as the *Vada* – feature strange vortices of energy that are said to contain the essence of the Nine Magickal Spheres. Occupying what could be thought of as the Umbrae of various planets – which, through some head-twisting quirk of celestiography, typically manifest on the Horizon of our own world – these Realms often go by the abbreviation *S.R.* followed by the Sphere associated with the Realm in question.

In Tradition cosmology, the planets within our solar system are associated with gods, energies, earthly phenomena, and magickal Spheres. Science, of course, seeks to strip away those associations and replace them with measurements of cold, dead space. Even then, however, the awesome spectacle of planetary might cannot be purged of wonder entirely. Scientists can wipe Pluto off the celestial roll-call, but the uncanny essence of S.R. Entropy still wears its mysterious shadow-cloak ... or so folks say. The Euthanatos Tradition sealed access to this Realm long ago and supposedly still control the few portals that reach it... which may, of course, have something to do with *why* those scientists purged it from the rolls!

Like Horizon Realms, these regions can be visited only through direct portals or Umbral wanderings. Several of them, like S.R. Correspondence, cannot be reached from Earth at all, although lesser Realms – essentially their moons – can still be found by a dedicated traveler. Occasionally, Shade Realms manifest as natural gateways on the skin of the Horizon, boiling with the energies associated with each Realm. Several – most especially S.R. Life and S.R. Forces – have long histories as Ascension War battlegrounds. The Doissetep conflagration sparked a war in the ruins that drew mages of all kinds to the stormy domain of S.R. Forces. Such conflicts, though, demand vast resources from everyone involved, so they rarely last for long. The few mages who indulge in such adventures are brave, powerful, and often crazier than hell. Grudges, greed, curiosity, and boredom inspire these daredevils, and very few of them return to Earth intact, if they return to Earth at all.

Shard Realm/ Planet	Shade Realm (S.R.)
Sol	Infinite
Mercury	Correspondence
Venus	Life
Earth & Luna	Prime
Mars	Forces
Jupiter	Matter
Saturn	Time
Uranus	Spirit (also originally regarded as the Realm of Mind)
Neptune	Mind
Pluto	Entropy

For details about each place, see **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds** (Chapter Five) and **The Infinite Tapestry** (Chapter Four).

As for the Realms themselves, they blaze and shudder with their associated energies. S.R. Forces is one huge, eternal tempest with tiny islands of temporary calm; S.R. Life boasts a primeval ecosystem that could shame the Hollow Earth; and S.R. Correspondence features more dimensions and perspectives than Picasso on an acid trip. S.R. Time is extremely hazardous, as moving through it *at all* results in temporal distortion and uncontrolled time travel. In S.R. Mind, a traveler's experiences depend entirely upon what she expects to see, whereas S.R. Spirit strips all illusions from the mortal/ spiritual divide, allowing a mage to speak face-to-face with her Avatar. S.R. Matter is thought to be the Hollow Earth itself (or, perhaps, a series of *related* Hollow Earths), and S.R. Entropy supposedly showcases the grand designs of mortality, possibly cycling directly back into the Underworld. The recursive nature of these regions and the *especially* subjective nature of their environments both demonstrate the folly of thinking too literally about landscapes or geography when discussing the Otherworlds!

The Second Horizon and Etherspace

Certain cosmologists insist there's a second Horizon – a *True Horizon* – located out past the moon and Mars, in the region of this solar system's Asteroid Belt. Between Earth's Horizon and this True Horizon, a cosmic Umbra often called *Etherspace* reaches outward toward the stars. Here, a traveler might pass from the hard vacuum of scientific space into the strange expanse of spirit space, where the laws of legend still prevail.

Out past Earth's Horizon, reality as we know it is far more fluid than it ever was back on Earth. Here, the principles of magick, faith, and science remain in constant flux. We have the airless vacuum of space, true enough, but as I mentioned earlier, certain mages survive just fine there without life-support gear.

In the old days, it's been said, flying ships waged strange wars and journeyed to distant planets in what was known as the *Void of Heaven*. In the Age of Steam, star-faring Etherites journeyed out into Etherspace, setting up colonies on Mars and Luna, discovering civilizations of other beings that could simply have been conjured by their own imaginations. (There are, after all, certain types of legendary Martians – Bug-Eyed Monsters, tentacled horrors, red-skinned nude beauties, and so on – and who's to say whether those entities exist on their own terms or whether they're there because someone *expected* them to be there...?) More recently, the Void Engineers, the Etherites, and occasional other explorers staged weird battles in this fluctuating space. Etherships and rocket ships out of science-fiction fantasies populated this space between the stars. Once again, however, that wild era screeched to a halt when the Avatar Winds kicked in and travel beyond our Gauntlet got more perilous. Given the distance between destinations and the risk of Disembodiment, few travelers have dared to start that space race up again. Supposedly, phantasmal ghost ships still flow through Etherspace, re-enacting cosmic firefights or flitting between colonies of ghost-ridden ruins. If these rumors are true, it puts an eerie spin on that whole idea of a space ghost...

To pass through this second Horizon, you'd need to find *Etherspace Anchorheads* – elusive vortices of arcane energy that flare and fade around the distant reaches of Etherspace. Like the lesser Anchorheads in the Earthly Horizon, these swirling clouds of energy can take a traveler out past the barrier. In this case, however, all known Anchorheads are warded by powerful entities that challenge and often destroy mortal trespassers. These beings are *very* territorial, and they must be tricked, appeased, or otherwise defeated before you can venture into deep space. It's been said that these creatures were once Master mages, or even the fabled *Oracles*, whose powers or understanding grew too great for Earth to contain. Now, though, they often appear as mad gods, protecting their Anchorheads like cosmic Cerberoi, snapping at anyone who intrudes upon their domains. If that's the origin of such entities, then the ideal of Ascension may be just an esoteric joke. There's nothing enlightened about these monsters at all!

Oh, and speaking of jokes, here's one on the Technocracy: the theory of Ether was supposedly disproved by scientific consensus around the turn of the last century. That disproval, in turn, was the reason the Etherites cited when they left the Order of Reason. Now, however, a new scientific theory posits that the universe consists of a near-zero-viscosity superfluid. And although no one's officially calling it Ether yet, the Technocracy may find itself hoist by its own metaphysical petard.

Creation works in very strange ways.

Shard Realms: Fragments of Genesis

Genesis stories both secular and sacred allude to a Big Bang that birthed the universe. According to certain cosmologies, the *Shard Realms* – which we now know as the planets of our solar system – were especially significant chunks of metaphysical debris. Reflecting mystic principles, these *Fragmenti* were considered the realms of ancient gods: Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, and so forth. We can see their influence in the everyday puzzles of astrology and the corresponding zodiac, through which we are "children of Mars" or "littered under Mercury."

To Otherworldly travelers, the planets are enigmas of the scientific revolution. According to the archives of Etherite explorers, those planets were, until recently, worlds unto themselves, with workable atmospheres and indigenous life. Now, though, the cold hand of Technocratic wisdom has reduced these worlds to spinning protoplasmic cauldrons and icy stone. Certain Etherites suggest that the only things standing between Earth's wonders and a similar fate are the mages who refuse to let such things happen. I don't know how true that is, but the idea is worth considering.

Whether or not the fabled adventures on Mercury and Mars actually took place on the planets themselves or within their Umbral Shade Realm reflections, it *is* a matter of record that modern-day mages occasionally travel further than Earthly scientists would have us believe. These days, the Shards *are* more or less "dead" by human estimations; if the great god Mars still makes his home on that red ball of rock, he's hiding his presence well. Still, the Etherites and Void Engineers send spaceships to the various planets and their moons, occasionally finding ruined Skyriggers and other mysteries on those planetary surfaces. Although the more obvious magickal phenomena seem restricted to the Shade Realms... at least for now... there has clearly been more mystic history throughout our solar system than the average person would possibly believe.

Outer Space: The Deep Universe

Out past the Asteroid Belt and its True Horizon, the *Deep Umbra* (or *Deep Universe*) plays host to the most powerful Marauders and Nephandi – mages too unstable for Earthly confines. Rumor has it that the Traditions and Technocracy joined forces during and after World War II to drive these demented creatures out past the Horizon. Afterward, the story claims, those factions thickened one or both Horizons to keep the Mad Ones, the Fallen, and their various cosmic horrors on the far side. If that's true, however, then Earth's Horizon is a poor protection – a powerful wizard can get around it easily enough. Beyond that, though, the story has another major flaw in its logic: if the Horizon is supposed to keep sinister titans out in deep space, why have so many Technocrats and Etherites been dedicated to leaving Earth behind and venturing off into the dark?

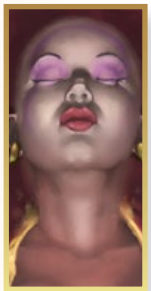
Because, yes – there *are* demonic entities out there in the Void of Heaven. That much is a matter of record. Just as the deepest seas contain creatures too vast for dry land, so the Deep Umbra teems with creatures who'd eat Godzilla for a light snack. The Void Engineers have their Pan-Dimensional Corps to deal with such threats, but their record is spotty at best. The age-old terror of alien invasion is apparently valid, and although the Engineers and Etherites maintain their Earthly rivalry in deep space, they also share camaraderie and occasional cooperation in the face of mutual threats.

So why go there to begin with? Because Paradox, the scourge of magick here on Earth, does not exist in deep space at all. A mage who's powerful enough to fly through space naked while shooting fireballs out his ass can do so without Reality slapping him into next week. The difference between "realspace" and "Umbraspace" gets hazy out beyond the Horizon. Both science and magick seem equally possible in the Void.

Such metaphysical ambiguity makes the Deep Umbra a natural playground for the Mad Ones, who're crazy enough to create their own bubbles of personal space. Powerful wizards can, and *do*, construct majestic fortresses on asteroids and distant planets, tapping cosmic sources of alien Quintessence to fuel deeds that would be impossible back on Earth. Distant moons and solar systems supposedly hold Nephandic strongholds of cyclopean scope. For obvious reasons, the Deep Umbra seems like a tempting destination for mages who want to remake Reality in their own image.

Thing is, most mages can't *survive* in this environment. Toss any Technocrat – and almost anyone else, for that matter – out an airlock door, and she's dead. If nothing else, her own belief will kill her. Travelers who've been less indoctrinated by the scientific view of space stand a better chance of survival in those situations, but even the most primal willworkers still have to eat and drink... and such resources are not exactly common in the Void. Without some sort of spaceship or portal, a traveler could spend *centuries* getting from one place to another. In the meantime, she'd probably go mad from sheer monotony. Think of space as an infinite desert, featuring occasional oases separated by mind-numbing stretches of epic *nothing*. When you realize how vast this Deep Umbra truly is, it's a wonder anyone comes back from there at all.

Return to the Inner Experience



Supposedly, deep space leads back into the Earthly realm. I've heard that Umbral travelers occasionally wind up in the blackest regions of our oceans and that deep sea travelers discover portals into space. Once again, recursive quirks in the universe connect "out there" with "in here." Perhaps, as the Masters of Correspondence say, all places really *are* one place. The distance between them is merely an illusion we can transcend if and when we learn to forget everything we think we know.

Just think of it this way: right now, you could be standing in a park or sitting in a room while your mind roves out across the universe. My words might come to you across vast distances of space and time... and yet, for a while at least, we occupy the *same* space and time. By sharing visions of what magick could be, what our world might be, what human potential might be if and when we stretch beyond what we think we know, we can span eternity without moving a step.

And *that*, fellow traveler, is the truest magick there is.

Microcosm, Macrocosm

In that old concept called *microcosm and macrocosm*, small things symbolize large things and vice versa, too. The human body reflects the universe, and the universe can be found in the cells of a fingertip. According to the mystic Jewish Kabbalah, the Divine Presence split Itself into infinity through a titanic thunderbolt that birthed the universe. Whether or not you choose to call that Presence God is your decision; there are, by most reckonings, many gods, a single God, and no gods at all. Whatever creed you choose to follow, it's been said that all existence remains tied to that Original Cosmic Source... and so, in that sense, all things still *are* One and the same.

Scientific theory asserts that we're the product of a Big Bang – a cosmic explosion that essentially recalls that Kabbalistic thunderbolt. By that explanation, we are, as the song says, all made of stars. Deep space, then, is inner space as well. The Void becomes the Ocean becomes the molecules from which we're made. The journey of a thousand years can take place in a moment without moving through space at all.

It's easy to get lost in this life – to wander through shadows searching for Truth. And the more Awakened you are, the easier it can be to get lost. Sure, it's dangerous... but, as danger often is, it's beautiful as well. And if you recall the microcosm and the macrocosm, you'll keep the map of your travels deep inside yourself. I can't guarantee you safe passage or a happy ending – hell, *everybody* dies in the end – but I can promise you this much: miracles and adventures are as close as you want them to be... as close, really, as the cells of the skin upon your hands.

So when you step out the door and into this strange world of ours, keep your eyes open and your mind keen. Recall the connections between yourself and the world around you. As Walt Whitman said, you are infinite. You contain multitudes. To look in the mirror is to gaze into infinity, and to see your fellow entities, in all their vast potential, is to view the living face of God.

BOOK II: BELIEVE

The more we see,
the more we think we know.

Porthos Fitz-Empress,
The Fragile Path

Chapter Five: Ascension Warriors

As he entered the cave, they heard a voice from inside:
"This is the man who shook the earth, who made the kingdoms tremble!"
– Daniel C. Matt, "*The Wedding Celebration*" from *The Essential Kabbalah*

Ten of Swords

Associations: *Release; sacrifice; paralysis; the end of a problem; reward and punishment; ends and beginnings; letting go...*

Well, THAT doesn't look good.

The RD I'd been tangling with is a grease spot on the floor. He tagged me good a few times, though, and my backup seems to be stuck in traffic.

On days like this, I'm thankful for adrenaline. The shock hasn't set in yet, and once it does I'm going to be down for the count.

Broken ribs for sure. I can see one of them peeking through the gash in my shirt. Blood like you wouldn't believe. No wonder we always wear black. The blood doesn't show up much on black.

Right arm's at 26% functionality. The rest of my team is down. Puddles, really. Stupid werewolves. They never come quietly, and this one was ready for us.

Where the hell's my backup?

Okay. Assess the situation. Repeated blunt trauma. Probable concussion. Four sharp-trauma injuries I can count. Broken ribs, possible broken right arm. Blurry vision. Substantial blood-loss. The ringing in my ears is not a good sign.

Hmmmm. I wonder if the burn in my veins is boosted adrenaline, or the start of self-activated detection-and-identification avoidance measures? Now that Agents Royce, Faber, Campbell, and Chiacuma have been fully activated, my appraisal of the effects is a bit more than strictly academic.

No. I have to maintain. Someone needs to make a report.

"This is Passel," I whisper into my com. "We're down. Where's my backup?"

"Situation contained?" Dispatch's voice sounds steady and flat.

"Affirmative. Contained."

"Sit tight, Agent Passel," she tells me. "Backup's en route."

As the burn in my veins intensifies, I wonder if she's telling the truth, or if I'll be the next puddle on the sidewalk…

Familiar Enemies

Mage history is a chronicle of lies. Each group, sect, faction, cult, Tradition, and what-have-you has its own version of *what-happened-when* and *who-did-what-to-whom*. There's a ton of legendry involved, as well as wishful thinking, cultural myopia, and flat-out deception. You'll rarely get straight answers from a mage when you ask about the history behind his practice. And so, in the interests of clarity, we'll be as straightforward as possible in this section of **Mage 20th Anniversary**.

Unlike previous editions of **Mage** (aside from **Sorcerers Crusade**), **Mage 20** does not default to a Traditions-centric viewpoint. Instead, we're presenting a wide range of potential **Mage** characters. With that range comes a bigger perspective on the Awakened experience, so the following chapter features as objective a view as you could possibly get from a world in which reality is anything but certain.

Does that mean we're going all kumbaya on your ass? Not hardly. In a way, knowing that everyone is both right and wrong throws the Ascension War... or, more properly, its *wars*, plural... into greater relief. Every faction holds both wisdom and corruption. The Traditions fight a good romantic fight while ignoring the potential horrors of their victory. The Technocracy oppresses everyone else in the name of order, often crushing its own people in the process. The scattered groups known by other factions as the Disparates or Crafts tend their own turf but lack the power or cohesiveness of the larger groups. And the Marauders and Nephandi celebrate nightmarish goals of mass insanity and damnation. For the so-called "orphans," life's a constant struggle in the wake of greater forces. And all mages, regardless of their faction or lack of one, find themselves pitted against vampires, werecritters, hunters, spirits, demons, changelings, human rivals, and Reality itself. No matter which faction you prefer – especially if you favor no faction at all – a mage's Path is perilous at best... her biggest enemy perhaps being the one within.

As previous chapters have mentioned, a mage must be *proud* to do what he does. That pride, in turn, leads to hubris, egotism, and self-delusion. The history of the Awakened, then, is a long tale of people and groups so full of themselves that reality trembles at their touch. Even with their best intentions, these groups and people leave corpses whenever they go... and the more devoted to their ideals they are, the more corpses they tend to leave. The greatest casualty, though, is the illusion of certainty – for, as any mage soon learns, there's no such thing as a single, objective Truth.

Mage isn't about good guys, bad guys, or clear-cut realities. It's about deciding for yourself what is and is not true. And so, even here, in a section devoted to Awakened history, the Rashomon Effect applies to everything you read. Take it all with a few shakers of salt, and remember that truth – whatever that might be – lies somewhere between the lines, not in any single faction's view.

Who, What, Where, and Why

For clarity, the following chapter is divided up into several sections, each one dealing with a specific group or subject:

- **Part I: An Awakened History** (pp.121-135) covers the evolution of mage society, from its mythic beginnings to the present day.
- **Part II: The Council of Nine Mystick Traditions** (pp.136-165) explores this proud alliance of survivors who strive toward an age of miracles.
- **Part III: The Technocratic Union** (pp.166-195) presents the governing force of Enlightened Science and implacable Control.
- **Part IV: The Disparates** (pp.196-223) examines some of the most prominent sects that refuse to join either the Council or Technocracy.
- **Part V: The Fallen** (pp.224-233) reveals the Nephandi, whose vision of Descent is more powerful than anyone realizes.
- **Part ?*!: The Mad** (pp.234-243) takes an unsettling look at what happens when the Marauders swallow sanity whole and make everyone else choke on the remains.

None of the Above?

For all the monumental metaplot covered in the following chapter, remember this:

You don't HAVE to fight the Ascension War at all.

In several ways, this chapter is optional. Your mages might not belong to any of the groups described here. You could just

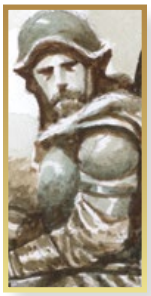
What About the Sorcerers?

According to the **Revised** edition of **World of Darkness: Sorcerer**, the Traditions now have unAwakened hedge magicians as well as Awakened mages among their ranks. Given the complexities and complications involved in hedge magic game systems, however, that merger has been ignored in **Mage 20**. If your individual troupe wants to feature sorcerers among the mages, go for it. The following chapters and rules do not address that subject – there's simply not enough room here to do justice to the idea.

check out the Orphans entry (pp.214-215) and then run self-Awakened or unaligned mages in groups of your own design. The following metaplots could follow various Future Fate options, and they might not even exist within your chronicle at all. The **Mage** canon can get pretty elaborate, but your chronicle doesn't have to be.

Mages have a vast world, but that world can be as epic or as intimate as you want it to become.

Part I: An Awakened History



Where did it all begin?

That's always the question, isn't it? And especially when you're talking to and about the Awakened, it's not a question you can answer with surety. The truth, assuming one exists, keeps getting tangled up in mythologies. We do know this much, though:

It started with a bang.

According to many myths, a cosmic Sound – a phrase, a song, a thunderbolt – cracked through the empty Void, filling it with possibilities. One, or Nothing, became All. Was this some Big Bang, a titanic OM, a godhead shattering itself into infinity... and really, aren't they all just different ways of looking at the same thing? Whatever the cause, the Void broke and Creation spilled forth.

Infinities passed. Stars blazed. Balls of spinning stone cooled to become worlds. It's been said that in those earliest days, holy hands passed over waters and set things into place. God-wars raged and their carnage shaped the universe. Deities cast their servants down into an Abyss, and that Divinity tore itself in half – Light and Darkness, the broken shells of what was and the bright spheres of what is. Perhaps it was simply a mythologized play of natural forces... or maybe there was something more. The truth, as it so often is, was lost to time and space.

The Awakening Era

These forces shaped the Earth we know – a crown jewel of Heaven, perhaps, or just one spinning rock among the multitude. In any case, this has always been our home. In the First Days, legends claim, the gods walked across that home, giants in our world. They shaped it, claimed it, chose their people, and set our world into form.

Some folks claim that Pure Ones, living shards of the divided One, incarnated themselves into human flesh; other tales say we rose from beasthood to claim this world or that we were born as servitors to some Great Race now lost to time. There are stories telling how animals and humans were once family, one People with many skins; other myths tell of a single God who claimed a Garden from which we Fell through disobedience to Him. We are said to have gathered long ago at Mount Meru, the center of the world, or around a great Tower that trembled and then fell to ruins. These are the *Primordial and Edenic Ages*, when human origins rise from myths. What *is* certain is that both magick and humanity began in this vast span of time.

Before we were hunters, we humans became prey. A *Great Fall* supposedly cast us down from Eden and wrecked celestial harmony in our world. Monsters chased us to our caves, clawing their way into our deepest memories. Fallen from some greater grace, we became toys for demons and fiends. This is the *Predatory Age*, when we ran through the shadows like frightened mice. In time, though, fire and stone, magick and faith drove the monsters back. We formed tribes, creeds, technologies, and they separated us from the beasts.

Perhaps kingdoms rose – empires we remember now only as legendary names like Atlantis, Mu, Hyperboria, and Nod. Or maybe we just scrabbled in the dirt for millennia, grasping at tools and pulling ourselves up from feral origins. There *were* cataclysms, though – we know that much: fires, floods, icy ages, and falling stars. Those legendary kingdoms (if they'd existed to begin with) fell into ruins. In this *Cataclysm Age*, humanity advanced, was broken, and rose again. Hubris, our fatal pride, might have been to blame for this *Shattered Time*. If this is true, though, then that same pride brought us back from ruin.

And magick and technology led the way.

The Legendary Era

In a long *Tribal Age*, the remnants of humanity began to struggle upward. Once again, tribes swelled slowly into villages, towns, and cities. Through it all, Awakened leaders paved the way, battling monsters and sharing their Arts. Metalwork, pottery, witchcraft, language, math, and mythology all led to greater things. Some mages, though, became tyrants, enslaving their rivals or burning settlements to the ground. At the *Dawn of Empires*, large cities became hubs of wisdom, trade, and warfare. India, China, Mesopotamia, and Africa saw the first stirrings of our remembered civilizations. A *Heroic Age* arose from them – an age recalled in myths and scriptures in which gods, men, and monsters battled across this dawning world.

The Classical Era

Swords and spells carved a path toward the *Classical Era*, when the foundations were laid for our modern age: Israel. Troy. Babylon. Qin. Meroe. The Olmecs, Persians, Nubians, Mycenaens, Aryans, and so forth. Vast empires forged greater civilizations, bringing trade and war to every place they touched. Extensive networks of travel and conquest crossed Africa, Asia, and Europe, exchanging magicks, goods, technologies, and creeds. A heady alchemy of achievements bred sects that still exist today. Scriptures were written, texts set down. And although the distant landmasses we now call Australia and the Americas will remain isolated from this interplay for over two thousand years, these places began to see their own Arts and cultures grow.

The Cup and the Reed

According to Hermetic lore, we can date the foundations of the Nine Traditions and Technocratic Order to a gathering in ancient Egypt. Two rulers – Hatshepsut and Thothmes III – supposedly gather a collection of sages, clerics, artisans, and seers from across the known world sometime around 1480 BCE. Forming two orders from these disparate individuals – the Cupbearers of Isis and the Reed of Thothmes – the rulers briefly unite warring factions and create common ground for future alliances.

In later years, this gathering will be called a myth, if it's recalled at all. The Hermetics, though, insist they have proof in their archives... or at least, that such proof *used* to exist before the fall of Doissetep. In any case, these orders, or *lodges*, provide a foundation for greater understandings of magick, faith, and science. From this point onward, all three Arts will grow, advance, and prosper... often through alliances and wars with one another.

Through it all, mages from around the world joined together in fellowships, or else divided themselves into warring clans. *Thanatoics*, *Ecstatics*, *Akashics*, and courtly wizards clashed or joined with witches, shamans, sages, priests, and seers. Philosophers and artisans cultivated Arts and Sciences; prophets hurled harsh words and miracles. The origins of modern mage-sects began their problematic dance with one another, shaping rivalries and alliances that continue even now. Magick, faith, and science started distinguishing themselves from one another, leading to battles over the source of truth and heresy. At some times, these rivals met respectfully; at others, they turned cities into sand and ash.

Written language, originating around this time, preserved names, events, and empires from this period: Imhotep, Abraham, Suleiman, Huangdi and Lao Tsu, Djhowtey and Sesheta, Moses, Daedalus, and many more. The lines between heroes, gods, legends, and mages of this time remain blurry to this day. Great things happened, some of which we remember, many of which got lost. In that hazy early history, truth is debatable at best.

The Himalayan Wars

One of those conflicts holds special significance: the *Himalayan Wars*. Around 900 BCE, groups of Indian Thanatoics and Asian Akashics suffered a profound misunderstanding; that misunderstanding provoked a war that raged for centuries and left permanent distrust between the rival factions. Because both sides embraced reincarnation, mages slain throughout the conflict kept being reborn to fight it again. In later years, it will be said that this conflict was intentional – a fire through which both groups needed to pass in order to forge their later incarnations. In either case, it was rather miserable for all concerned. The *Akashayana* – originating somewhere in present-day Tibet – moved further east and west, whereas their rivals dug in further in the Indian subcontinent. The worst elements of mystic conflict flickered across Lower Asia and Upper Africa for over 600 years.

War marked this entire period; Celts ranged across Europe; Greeks, Persians, Assyrians, Nubians, Chinese, Koreans, Aryans, Egyptians, Hebrews, and other cultures wet their foundations with the blood and skins of their enemies. Great discoveries and arts defined this period too, but the entire world seemed to be at war. The greatness of one group often came from stomping other groups into the ground. There can be room, it seemed, for only one truth at a time.

Shaping Reality to Your Will

In this period, mages discovered a strange principle: reality is not constant; its parameters shift and change depending on the dominant beliefs. If you rule a land, and you rule its people, then you begin to rule its *reality* too. Certain forms of magick or technology prospered in some places and failed in others. This discovery led mages to fight over territory – to begin a metaphysical imperialism that shaped the world we know today.

Some mages became conquerors or monarchs; most, however, put their power behind the throne or spoke for gods that seemed unhappy with this group or that empire. Quite a few of them simply staked out their own territories and defended them from rival mages. The word "mage" appeared around this time, defining a priestly order dedicated to certain Persian gods... really, a select *type* of mage. Still, that connotation of

The Kitab al-Alacir

Rooted in the discoveries of this era, a variety of Greek observations are eventually collected by Arab scholars into the *Kitab al-Alacir*: "Book of the Ether." This paradoxical text spans mythology, puzzles, dialogues, philosophies, and ruminations on truths that remain impossible to codify. Rather than present facts as mortals understand the term, this venerable work inspires Awakenings in the people who manage to grasp its slippery implications. Centuries after its composition, the *Kitab* remains an essential textbook for – of all people – the Etherite Scientists, who view its metaphysical complexities as the foundation of understanding.

Using the analogy of Troy as the cosmos and the Trojan War as a metaphor for human consciousness, the *Kitab* postulates that understanding involves a perpetual conflict between *what can be accepted* and *what must be possible*. Each person must therefore become a "hero of Troy," pursuing glory in the struggle for ultimate truth. Because only the bravest and most dedicated souls possess the determination to become such heroes, most people will remain mere soldiers inside or outside the walls of this metaphysical Troy.

In that conflict (and its labyrinthine commentary throughout the *Katib*), each reader must find his or her own answers. The core of the work, though, seems to be this: *everything is REAL, but not everything is TRUE. When we take what's real and make it true, we create miracles of Art and Science; when we craft truths to deny that something's real, we create disaster.*

sacred, mystic dedication will eventually define the folks who bend Reality with force of Will.

Artisanship – the Art of Enlightened Technology – attained new heights in China and Greece. Great philosophers, scientists, and artisans redefined possibility. Side by side with mystics, these men and women forged the greatest civilizations since the mythic Hyperborian Age. Miraculous machines and titanic feats of architecture dominated the Classical world. In contrast with the bloody Arts of prophets, seers, and witches, these achievements made all other crafts seem positively... barbaric. That tension – civilized Masters of Order versus barbaric Hordes of Chaos – became a defining element of human culture.

In the shadows of these achievements, other sects undermined civilization. Certain mages and cults dedicated themselves to corruption and pride, whereas others went mad and destroyed everything they touched. The names *Marauder* and *Nephandi* were still far in the future; their effects, however, could be felt along the seams of the Legendary Age and Classical Era.

Other regions, too, refined their Enlightened Arts. On every continent, human cultures thrived, each with its own types of mystics and artisans. Although China, Persia, Greece, and soon Rome defined this era's history, you could find mages anywhere in the world: shapechangers, medicine-folk, witches, priests, philosophers, healers, craftsmen, and seers. Certain mages worked to improve the common good, but others summoned monsters and ruled through fear. Humanity spread; the Gauntlet thickened between the human and spirit realms. Belief and culture shaped humanity... and humanity, in turn, reshaped our world. Again.

Modern Mage Factions Emerge

Several groups took shape throughout the Classical Era. Although many of them won't be known by the following names for quite some time to come, they'll eventually define the modern battles for reality:

- The *Hermetic Orders* that emerged in Egypt, Greece, Nubia, and Rome.
- The *Dalou-laoshi*, Chinese sacred artisan-technologists.
- The *Pythagorans*, whose applications of magick and technology spawned both mystic and Technocratic sects.
- The *Collegium Praecepti*, supreme academy of Enlightened Artisanship.
- The *Akashayana*, an Akashic Brotherhood whose mystic Way involved both harmony and violence.
- The *Chakravanti*, Thanatoic mystics who bonded together for protection from Akashic warriors.
- The *Ahl-i-Batin*, who emerged from the Himalayan Wars as a force for Balance and Unity.
- The *Eleusinians*, whose mysteries of ecstasy, death, and rebirth will influence initiation and practice for thousands of mystic sects and secret societies, Awakened and otherwise.
- The *Great Mother Temples*, networked throughout the Classical world under many names.
- The *Mithraics*, warrior-priests of a heroic god.
- The *Druids*, nature-clerics whose loose confederations guided the Celtic lands.
- The *Ngo-Ami*, Nubian wizard-artisans from Upper Africa.
- The *Uzoma*, spirit-speakers from Northern and Central Africa, whose ways will be scattered but not forgotten.
- The *Wu Lung*, court sorcerers of Imperial China.
- The *Messianic Voices*, who emerged in the wake of Jesus' ministry.
- The *Taftáni*, Persian and Arabian "weavers" of sacred Arts, inspired by Suleiman the Wise.
- The *Buddhist sages* who transformed the religious and secular beliefs of Asia.
- ...and the *Abrahamic Prophets*, whose fiery words inspired Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

In the vibrant intersection of Lower Asia, Upper Africa, and Lower Europe, these groups, and others, create a *Golden Age of Empires, Magic, Technology, and Faith*.

It lasted for centuries... but nothing endures forever.

The High Mythic Ages

The cracks appeared as "barbarians" oppressed by empires began to gnaw at the empires, infiltrated them, and gradually tore them down. The birth of the Christ heralded the fall of older gods. Faiths clashed as tribal cultures grew to hordes. The hubris of Egypt, Greece, Carthage, Israel, Rome, Persia, and other empires led to their expansion, collapse, and assumption into other hands. Vandals, Visigoths, and Huns turned cities into ruins. China's empire teetered between internal wars and external invasions, eventually breaking into three warring kingdoms. By around 600 CE, the Classical empires were mostly gone... and with them, their hold on mass reality. In this surge and ebb of empires and sects, grand acts of magick, faith, and science dominated the age.

Later days will call the era after Rome's collapse the *Dark Ages*, but that idea really isn't true. Although most of Greco-Roman culture slipped between the cracks of Europe's history, China remained battered and divided and yet still strong. Lower Asia enjoyed the *Golden Age of India*. Korea and Tibet emerged as vibrant powers, with similar expansions of the Mayan culture in Lower America and the Axum in Upper Africa. A *Golden Age of Pagan Magick* dominated Europe as Celtic, Pictish, Germanic, Slavic, Scandinavian, and Greco-Roman mages worked their Arts. Christian mystics began to

forge a cross-cultural empire throughout Europe, and African Berber Moors conquered the Iberian Peninsula. Meanwhile, the armies of the Prophet spread the new-born creed of Islam across Africa, the Middle East, parts of Asia, and segments of Europe. The Ngo-Ami and their people crossed further down into Africa to escape this Muslim expansion, founding cities and sects along the way. This mix of culture and liberty fueled the *Golden Age of Wizardry*.

Without the centralized influence and technologies of Rome and aided by the Pagan paradigm, most of Europe became "open territory" for any mage strong enough to take it. The embattled Three Kingdoms provided similar freedom throughout China, whereas the Indian, North African, and Arab-Persian cultures (also battered by invasions) embraced high magick as part of their realities. Most of the world accepted magick as perfectly real, so mages whose practices fit the regional cultures (as nearly all of them do) enjoyed grand power. The extensive cultural exchanges of the Classical Era combined with the mystical freedoms unleashed by the barbarian conquests refined the mystic Arts to unprecedented heights by this period. With the new Art of alchemy – originated by Greek and Arabian mages – these Arts allowed for a glorious range of mystic pursuits. When modern wizards speak of "*the Mythic Age*," they're usually referring to this era.

Blood, Passion, and the Elements

To hear Tradition mages talk about it, you'd think that the European Middle Ages were a time of unbridled wonder and magnificence. In fact, the era was nasty, brutal, and filled with pain. Fiefdoms trembled between war and starvation, with the growing influence of an increasingly corrupt Church offering comfort in the storm. Monsters filled the nighttime hours, and toil filled the days. Forests that had been cut back to accommodate Roman roads and cities regrew, thick and perilous. Roads crumbled and ruins tumbled. Various kings and warlords attempted to preserve Roman laws and government, and artisans retained technologies of the lost Classical Age. Christian monks became the keepers of law, science, and literature, with their libraries being the few places between Cordoba and Byzantium where such knowledge was preserved. Proud Pagans reached deep into the Old Ways of blood, passion, and the elements, filling the word "witch" with connotations of envy, horror, and admiration.

There *was* freedom of a sort in this age... the freedom to be murdered, sucked dry, or hauled off in a plague-cart. Pagan mages and their Christian counterparts fought mysterious battles throughout the continent; Muslims pressed the edges of Christendom, enjoying a prosperity few Europeans could imagine. There *were* flashes of hope in this desolate age, places where the wars, plagues, and invasions never reached. And it *was* a vigorous time, filled with inquiry, experiments, and lots and *lots* of magick. Still, it was also a dismal era for the common European. Many folks embraced the mystic Arts, if only as relief from crushing poverty, famine, field work, and war.

The Web of Faith

For Islam, this was a Golden Age in which science, faith, and magick became almost indistinguishable. The *Mokteshaf Al-Hour* –

Ideals of Avalon

Even among the Awakened, authentic details about the Arthurian Era wind up obscured by time and romanticism; later impressions of Camelot, for example, involve concepts and technologies that won't exist in common history for over 500 years. Still, the ideal of Camelot and its heroes shines to mystics and Technocrats alike.

Originally founded by Romanized Britons, the kingdom that will later be known as Camelot begins sometime around 600 CE. Mingling mystic Celtic and Pictish practices with the ritual Arts of Rome, the founders of Camelot devise a sophisticated blend of Classical Artisanship, Christian mysticism, and Pagan elemental Arts. Forging advanced armor and weapons, these visionaries also strike pacts with Britain's fae inhabitants and the werewolves known as *Fianna*. By presenting a stronghold of tolerance and mutual protection, the kingdom prospers. The *Pendragon Dynasty* shares a sacred marriage with the *Clan of Morrigan*, a witch-priestess lineage tied innately to the land, yet the dynasty retains the technological Arts of Rome. Through communion with the faeries, spirits, and gods, Camelot rises to attract the best in every side.

In the reign of Arthur's father Uther, the wizard Merlin (also called *Merlinius*) offers to aid the dynasty; when Arthur comes of age, the two of them present the masculine face for the kingdom at its height: magick and majesty working side by side. And for a time, they work *well*.

Is it the lusty Gwenhwyfar (Guinevere) whose influence destroys Camelot? Or the Christianized betrayer Lancelot? Or the Pagan witch Morganna? Is there a magical pact broken between the king and the land, or do they fall out of favor with the gods for mingling religions? Every legend tells a different story, and more than one of those stories may be true... or even, perhaps, none of them at all. Whatever the reason, Camelot falls in a massive battle that kills nearly everyone involved. Enemy forces burn the kingdom, and the castle eventually falls into ruins. Dying Arthur is taken off to Avalon, where he supposedly awaits England's hour of greatest need. (Considering that he didn't emerge during World War II or the Thatcher era, this last part may be wishful thinking...)

So who *was* Arthur? Ultimately, he's a symbol. Although the Verbena, Hermetics, Choristers, Templars, Gabrielites, and even Iteration X will eventually call him one of their own, the real Arthur is a myth larger than any real person or faction. In the ideals of Camelot and Avalon, that symbol speaks an eloquent gospel almost anyone can relate to. Honor, courage, wisdom, leadership – few mages, even among the Nephandi, *wouldn't* want to see those virtues in the mirror. And so, the myth of Avalon, beyond its historical reality, has become a vibrant paragon for mages everywhere.

"Collectors of Light" – epitomized this fusion, combining Allah's creed with ancient wisdom to forge new mystical technologies. The Taftâni – a loose collection of nomads until then – forged a single group under that name in 650; the Ahl-i-Batin created a Web of Faith in 724; and in 756, an alliance of these mages finally ended an infernal *Devil-King Age* that had dominated the Middle East for six centuries. Muslim and Jewish scholars collected the scattered remnants of Classical achievement, then expanded upon them. *Kabbalism*, an elaborate tradition of Jewish mysticism, came from this conflux of ideas and prosperity.

Islam expanded throughout Mediterranean Europe and upper Africa, melding various Pagan and Classical traditions from Nubia, Egypt, Persia, and Arabia under the banner of the Prophet. Kingdoms thrived in the African interior, where the Ngo-Ami pursued an African discipline of High Ritual Magick that blended Egyptian, Greek, Muslim, Zoroastrian, and Pagan African elements. Other groups appeared as well, but the Ngo-Ami, Uzoma, Batini, Taftâni, and Mokteshafi, along with unaligned *sohanci* ("wizards"), dominated the region during these so-called "middle ages."

In Europe, North African Berbers and Arabs ruled most of the Iberian Peninsula – modern-day Spain and Portugal – then known as *Andalus*, a pinnacle of medieval European civilization. Divided, like most of Europe, into often-fractious kingdoms, Andalus (also known as *al-Andalusia*) became a hub of scholarship, art, and magick where many of the "lost" secrets of Rome, Greece, and Egypt continued to flourish. Although later generations will dismiss this era as "the Moorish conquest," the Andalusian period lasted over 700 years and nurtured Muslim, Jewish, and Christian cultures in relative peace and prosperity... a peace that ends in the bloody rise of two nations that will crush civilizations and usher in an age of conquest, slavery, and war across five continents.

Wizards and Witches, Clerics and Knights

After centuries of skirmishes between rival factions, the *Order of Hermes* came together on Midwinter Night, 767. Lady Trianoma, a Gnostic seer, foresaw the imminent collapse of the Hermetic way, so she gathered allies to establish a mystic alliance. Divided into 12 Houses, these wizards pursued a synergetic form of High Ritual Magick. The Order enjoyed perhaps its greatest triumph soon afterward, defeating a Turkish necromancer and, from him, seizing the massive stronghold called Doissetep.

Around the same time, an order of Christian warrior-magi swore fealty to Emperor Charlemagne, echoing an older legend of King Arthur and his Knights of Camelot. These *Palatine Knights* drew upon Classical lore, Romanized Christianity, and the nascent form of what will soon be called "chivalry." Recognizing a potential threat, Pagan mystics banded together in loose confederations sometimes referred to as *Spirit Talkers*, *Valdaermen*, and *devotees of the Old Faith*.

And there were other groups too, whose Arts and Craft would soon shatter this world...

The Dragon Emperor

In Asia, a divided China spent most of this period in chaos, torn by war, intrigue, dissent, and periodic invasion from Mongols and Turks. The High Artisans of various clans kept themselves busy inventing weapons, fortifications, and other technologies of war. Like China itself, the Wu Lung divided themselves into various factions – some allied with the Akashics, others battling against them. The Akashayana, for their part, refined devastating Arts of self-defense but began to withdraw to a more peaceful monastic life. Despite internal schisms between various Chinese, Tibetan, and Indian factions, the formerly "warring fists" strove for unity under the Akashic Way... and, for the most part, they found it.

Aided by a powerful warrior-seer known as Curly Beard, a dragon-rider called Li Tsing, and the gender-changing Akashayana warrior-concubine Chang, a heroic mage named Li Shihmin reunited China around 618, becoming the T'ang Dragon Emperor Tai Tsung in 627. Within a few years, he crushed the Mongols, his son conquered Korea, and this T'ang Dynasty absorbed both rivals into a growing Chinese Empire. China's return to glory reenergized the Wu Lung and Dalou-laoshi, by this time often known as the *Five Metal* (or *Elemental*) *Dragons*. The Akashayana, sadly, were not so fortunate. Burdened with generations of imperial displeasure (exacerbated by the Wu Lung), they suffered attacks and persecutions throughout the era.

For almost 300 years, China dominated the region as a single unified force. As before, though, intrigues, invasions, and betrayals cracked the Empire. By this time, however, the Wu Lung, Metal Dragons, and Akashic Brotherhood had attained the forms that would determine their ultimate futures.

The future Americas saw various sects rise and prosper. Sadly, the coming storm from the distant east will wipe away almost every trace of their achievements.

The Sorcerers Crusade

Revolutions begin with men and women of vision. Wolfgang von Reismann was one such man. Angered by warring wizards and sorcerous tyrants, he convened the *Gathering of the Square* in Frankfort during the summer of 997. This assembly of High Artisans, rich merchants, restless craftsmen, zealous clergy, and holy warriors formed an alliance of *Gabrielite Knights*, *Enlightened Craftmasons*, and the *Cabal of Pure Thought*... an alliance that would soon blow the High Mythic Ages apart.

Meanwhile, the Hermetic Order ripped itself to pieces. Houses Tremere and Flambeau exterminated the druidic House Diedne between 1003 and 1012. Tremere's Primus secretly became a vampire and turned his House into a clan of undead monstrosities. While Christianity gained power, Pagan mystics opened the Paths of the Wyck and herded magical beasts into the Otherworlds. *The Crusades* pitted Christian and Muslim mages and mortals against one another for over 200 years, leading to new sects that included the powerful *Knights Templar* and the Hermetic *House Golo*... the first stirrings of the future *Sons of Ether*.

Alliances between African and European sects fractured, and the Hermetic Order continued to do the same. The defecting House Golo helped found the *Natural Philosophers Guild*, and the vampiric House Tremere incited an all-out war in 1201. Ecstatic and Thanatoic groups formed the *Ananda Diksham* to protect their ways from Muslim purists as Islam began to push its way into India. An English visionary, Stephen Trevanus, defended the poor folk in the name of his majesty King Richard the Lion-Hearted; mythologized as "Robin Hood," Trevanus turned his reward from the king into the *Hanseatic League*: an alliance of merchants, artisans, and craftsmen that erected the pillars of a much more potent Order.

And then, the cannons roared.

1210 began the fall of the High Mythic Age. The *Craftmason Convention* laid the groundwork for a pending Order of Reason and then, with new-forged cannons and age-old treacheries, destroyed the Hermetic Covenant of Mistridge that fall. Invading Huns – bringing their own war-shamans – tore through Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Two decades later, the Catholic Church officially declared an *Inquisition* to purge heretics, witches, Jews, Muslims, and sorcerers from Europe. A *Mercy Schism* shattered the Messianic Voices, whereas Artisans, alchemists, merchant guilds, and Craftsmen fought, put aside their differences, and, in 1250, they formed the *Golden Guild Alliance*. The Ascension War had begun.

In Asia, Mongol Emperor Genghis Khan absorbed China into his empire by roughly 1280, adopting technological weaponry and governance. The *Kamikaze War* between China and Japan brought new allies to the Akashic Brotherhood: Shinto mystics whose shamanic ways blended well with the Taoist elements of the Way. Even here, the clash between Enlightened Science and Awakened Magick turned the tide... or, in this case, the winds and weather. By 1300, the writing was clearly on the wall.

The next century saw that tempest become a surge. Sects came together and broke apart. The Templars were betrayed and apparently destroyed by a French king called Phillip "the Fair." A Chakravanti seer called together mystics from across India, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Muslim and European Artisans severed ties, although Emperor Mansu Musa from the African Empire of Mali sent emissaries to Europe so they could join...

The Convention of the White Tower

Between March 1 and March 25, 1325, the *Order of Reason* began. Called together in a tower once owned by an assassinated Hermetic Master, delegates from Europe, China, the Middle East, India, and Mali forged the alliance that would eventually become the Technocratic Union. Under an Inner Circle council, eight Conventions form: the *Gabrielites*, *High Guild*, *Cosian Circle*, *Void Seekers*, *Celestial Masters*, *Craftmasons*, *Artificers*, and *Solificati*. This, in turn, kicked off over a century of warfare, both open and covert. The Solificati left the Order in 1335, to be temporarily destroyed and soon replaced by shadowy enforcers called the *Ksirafai*. Not long afterward, a *Screaming Ghost Purge* pitted the Wu Lung and Dalou-laoshi against the Akashics and their shamanic allies; new Enlightened Technologies drove the Brotherhood into remote mountain retreats throughout Mongolia, Tibet, and Japan. The warring

fists suffered heavy casualties and lost most of the influence they once held. In Central Africa, meanwhile, the *War of the Dust-Witch* devastated large portions of the region; the Ngo-Ami, now in decline, reformed under the name *Ngoma* and joined a new sect, the *Madzimbabwe*, to defeat the marauding Dust-Witches. A century and a half of plagues, purges, witch-hunts, lodge wars, assassinations, intrigues, and all-out wars began the era of the *Sorcerers Crusade*.

As airships rose into the heavens, hell descended to Earth. More plagues, more witch-hunts, more and larger wars all erupted across Europe, Asia, and Africa. The *Year of Great Sickness* broke the Ngoma/ Madzimbabwe alliance in 1420. The Gabrielite *Wolf Guild* ravaged Germanic Romani and Pagan settlements. Alchemists, Masons, and Hermetics waged bloody *Lodge Wars* across Northern Italian city-states, and Appa Bloodax made pacts with demons and created an infernal horde of his own... a horde soon commanded by his son, Tezghul the Insane. General Wyndgarde of the True Cross began a savage purge throughout the British Isles... a purge stopped by Nightshade, the only survivor of one of his massacres and a founder of the *Verbena* Tradition.

Those Nine Traditions got a slow but brilliant start around this time, as the Middle Eastern Ecstatic Sh'zar the Seer began to collect mystic allies. In 1440, Nightshade, Sh'zar, Messianic Singer Valoran, and Hermetic Master Baldric La Salle met in the ruins of Mistridge to discuss a new mystic alliance to combat the Order of Reason. In Africa, visions of a titanic white ghost heralded years of war and plague, while in Asia fighting began once again between Akashics and Hindus of the Left-Hand Path. A *Decade of the Hunt* swept through Britain, establishing the Verbenae as a terrifying force. And in 1448, the Daedalean armies of the Order of Reason besieged Doissetep, whose Earthly manifestation got demolished as wizards shifted the stronghold to a distant Otherworldly Realm. The following year, dragons and airships clashed as a Second Mistridge Convocation was attacked by Daedalean troops. Vampires united and Tezghuls's horde invaded. The Daedaleans swore an *Oath of Fire* to exterminate magick throughout the world.

But the mystics had had enough.

It took time. It took diplomacy. It took ordeals and visions and battles and journeys across the known world and through the Paths of the Wyck. It cost the participation of the *Disparates*: mystic groups, like the Ngoma and Taftâni, who refused to follow the Council's plans. But between 1457 and 1466, the *Council of Nine Mystic Traditions* was born: the *Ahl-i-Batin*, *Akashic Brotherhood*, *Chakravanti*, *Chœur* Céleste, *Dream-Speakers*, *Order of Hermes*, *Sahajiya*, *Solificati*, and *Verbenae* stood united... if only for a short time.

The Council Rises... and Falls

It all started out so well...

The *March of the Nine* saw a *First Cabal* of nine hand-picked representatives – one from each Tradition – set out from the Council's home-realm of Horizon on a mission of alliances and war. For three years, they made friends and annihilated enemies. Their example led other groups from both the Traditions and the Order. But in the Spring of 1470, the Solificati representative – Heylel Teomim – led the First Cabal into a Daedalean trap. After a massive battle, the Cabal was shattered. Most members were slain; the rest were captured; the seer Akrites escaped and led a rescue mission; and Heylel, then called *Thoabath* ("Abomination") the Great Betrayer, was taken to Horizon, put on trial, sentenced to Gilgul, and destroyed. In the course of the trial, the Solificati Primus was assassinated, and that group scattered for a second time.

In the wake of this defeat, the remaining Traditions sequestered themselves in Horizon. Tezghul rampaged across Europe and Asia, but he was finally defeated by the Order of Reason in the *Battle of Harz*. The triumphant Order of Reason attacked Horizon in a *Concordia War* that lasted throughout 1475. As devastating as that attack was, however, the Council defeated the Daedalean siege. Shortly afterward, the assassination of a Gabrielite Master sparked a retaliation effort that climaxed with the infamous *Burning Times*: a period of near-constant persecution in which mages, innocents, and anyone else unfortunate enough to be near them was put to painful, hideous death. And so, the Nine Traditions went underground... and for roughly 300 years, they stayed there, rebuilding their strength while the Order of Reason consolidated reality worldwide.

An Age of Conquest

That same period brought a sort of Apocalypse to the world at large. In the 1350s, a marauding confederacy of bandits, the *Red Turbans*, began to undermine Mongol China. By 1356, a former monk (said to be an Akashic Master) named Chu Yuan-Chang took command of the Turbans. Forming a disciplined military force with substantial mystic power, the Red Turbans spread throughout the region in a network of secret, often magickal societies. Winning the common people over through his virtuous ways, Chu Yuan-Chang expanded the Turbans' influence into Korea. After harrowing years of war, Chu Yung-Chang declared himself Emperor Hung-Wu and, in 1368, initiated the Ming Dynasty.

Ming China became a hotbed of secret societies – some instigated by factions among the Akashayana, Wu Lung, and Metal Dragons, others independent of them all. The formerly benevolent Hung-Wu turned into a paranoid tyrant. As the Emperor expanded Chinese influence into new regions, China grew rich in wealth and knowledge even as it was rocked by revolts and invasions. Hung-Wu's successors lost control of the growing number of secret societies, and by the time European explorers (many of them Daedaleans) spread their influence into China during the 1500s, the Ming Dynasty trembled toward collapse.

In what would soon be called *South America*, the Aztec Empire brought brutal forms of enlightenment across the upper part of the continent. Although that Empire featured some of the most advanced cultural achievements in the mortal world, its gods possessed an implacable thirst for blood. All empires are brutal, but the Aztecs refined a horrific form of mass religious sacrifice... practiced mostly on prisoners taken from other, weaker cultures. In a few decades, that sacred duty would annihilate the Aztec Empire.

During the mid-1400s, a pair of Iberian warrior-monarchs – King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile – consolidated power, obtained aid from the Catholic Church and the Order of Reason, overthrew the remaining Muslim kings of Andalus, and united a new nation: *Spain*. Flush with wealth, power, and hubris, the monarchs purged Jews, Muslims, non-Catholics, and rival mystics out of Spain. Isabella – by 1490 one of the most powerful members of the Cabal of Pure Thought – installed her "confessor," Tomás de Torquemada, as the Throne's personal scourge. The Order of Reason, riding a combination of victories and mostly freed from the interference of the Nine Traditions, initiated a program of exploration, achievement, and conquest from Spain and Portugal. This program, in turn, initiated three of the bloodiest atrocities in human history: the *Conquest of the Americas*, the *Spanish Inquisition*, and the *Triangle Trade*. With the "helpful" rivalry of neighboring Portugal, Spain expanded the Ascension War into Africa and the soon-to-be Americas.

Cannons, Chains, and Churches

The following centuries defy easy summation. Across the globe, however, it was an age of Technocratic dominion. The European Renaissance, which began in the late 1300s, drove all traces of the older Pagan age into the wilderness and the flames. Science of all forms blossomed from the farthest reaches of Asia to the shores of the America. This, however, was not the secular science of later years but a furious blend of inquiry and piety in which a scientist might be lauded as a man of God one day and shoved into a heretic's robe the next. The Order of Reason, deprived of its two greatest enemies, began to devour its own children.

The High Guild, enriched beyond the wildest dreams of an earlier age, began its transformation into the corrupt Syndicate it would become. Slavery, conquest, opium, and gold became foundations of its power... and of its eventual damnation. In the emerging era of vast nations, gold trumped all borders and funded all endeavors. The Celestial Masters, the Gabrielites, and the Explorators who dominated the Void Seeker Convention all relied upon the High Guild's favor, so they repaid it by pouring gold into the Guild's growing network of international trading companies. The Craftmasons, who spoke for the common folk, got marginalized "in the name of progress." Quiet threats, silent knives, and grotesque executions became standard practice within the Order of Reason. Machines that had been considered crimes against reality soon became common tools of mortal kings. Across the world, cultures fell to the guns, chains, and treacheries of European dominance.

For a time, a Technocratic rival expanded its influence throughout the Muslim world. The *Mübarek Maharet Meclisi* (or *Court of Sacred Sciences*) consolidated elements of the Mokteshaf Al-Hour and newer disciplines of the Ottoman Turks. Pounding against both the Christian European and Muslim Persian borders, the vigorous Turks devised technologies that even Daedaleans envied. Just as Europe conducted a perpetual state of war between its various empires, so Islam followed the division of

secular-tending Sunni and religiously orthodox Shi'a into several empires: the *Ottomans*, the *Iranians* (Persians), the *Songhai*, and the *Mughals*, who expanded into India and Asia during the 1500s. For centuries, the rival technocracies traded cannon volleys, plagues, innovations of strategy, and occasional alliances of trade and technologies. Only the divisions of religious orthodoxy kept these groups from utterly dominating the globe... a factor that got purged by the Technocratic Union a few centuries later.

The "New World's" Order

In the Americas, European invaders demolished the Aztec, Mayan, and Incan cultures, burning almost everything that would burn. Shipping African captives over to work in their South American "possessions," Spain and Portugal inspired a similar race from Upper European cultures. Within decades, England, France, Holland, and the Germanic states would initiate their own colonial programs in North America. A combination of disease, technology, and strategic division of ancestral enemies tore through the American cultures, weakening or destroying tribes and nations that had been evolving for thousands of years. Isolated from the cross-cultural exchanges between Europe, Africa, and Asia, the civilizations of Oceana and the Americas put up a fight but eventually collapsed in the face of European and Muslim-Asian expansion.

China, whose explorations reached as far as the North American coast, withdrew into itself as Japan surged into a powerful new and united era, led in part by Buddhist and Shinto mystics whose spiritual creeds did not oppose technology. "Zen science" refined devastating techniques of civil, mystic, and military technology outside the Order of Reason's influence. Again, the budding Technocracy found a rival with enviable creations. Enriched by the monumental resources of European conquest, the Order of Reason reached into China, Japan, Siam, and Korea from beyond the eastern horizon. By the mid-1600s, the Order of Reason extended around the world.

Unity, however, was still a long way off. National rivalries between the European powers, plus the bloody schisms between various Catholic and Protestant creeds, kept Europe in a perpetual state of war. The constant battle with Muslim and Chinese Artisans drove innovations in all three technocratic factions... and, over time, inspired a growing sense of "big picture" thinking. "Wouldn't it make more *sense*," the High Guild inquired, "to unite all of these marvelous thinkers into one magnificent Union?" Through interplays of force, temptation, bribery, and diplomacy, the European Order moved toward global consolidation, reform, and control. It's not surprising, really, that a Union forged from stolen gold, slavery, genocide, and conquest would be so easily corrupted...

The Burning Times

Mystic sects suffered a long and ugly tribulation in which words like "witch" or "heretic" could send anyone to the flames. Nursing wounds from the Great Betrayal and resulting schisms, the Council found itself reduced to eight Traditions, all of them divided by secular events. As the Europeans pushed into the Americas, the Native Americans belonging to the Dream-Speaker Tradition demanded intervention from their European counterparts... and were often refused. The growing slave trade split African Traditionalists between the "civilized" African wizard-priests from Upper Africa and the Ivory Coast, and their "tribal" neighbors from the cultures being pillaged.

European mages struggled with similar divisions, especially between Catholic Choristers and the ones who considered Protestantism to be a truer faith. The Houses of Hermes, in contrast, enjoyed enormous wealth. Most rulers in this period either *were* mages (like Isabella) or, like Queen Elizabeth I, had mages on their payroll. An *Age of Secret Societies* began, propagating lodges, sects, temples, and orders filled with mages and their Sleeper acolytes. But despite Awakened influence (or perhaps *because* of it), wars between their various nations kept those mages dueling in both the Awakened and unAwakened realms. Meanwhile, the Muslim Batini and the Christians of other sects drew further and further apart. The Muslim conquests in India, Greece, and Eastern Europe kept tensions high between the Chakravanti and Batini too, and the witch-hunts throughout Europe kept the Verbenae in a constant state of war with almost everyone else.

An odd division split the Council: the more traditional mages from oppressed cultures drew closer to one another, while the so-called civilized wizards and clergy looked down their collective nose at those barbarians. A rough confederation of Dreamspeakers (the hyphen dropped out of use during the 1600s), Verbenae, and Chakravanti-Euthanatos aligned itself against the Hermetics and Choristers, many of whom prospered from the Age of Conquest. In this tension, the Sahajiya – by this time favoring the title *Seers of Chronos* or simply the *Seers* – often played mediator between the other two groups. The Akashayana and Batini removed themselves further from the conflict. Theoretically, both favored Unity, but the warfare between Christendom, Islam, and the divided lands of Asia made that seem like a very unlikely ideal. In short, the Council was a mess.

The presence of slave-owning Hermetics almost destroyed the Council of Traditions, for although slavery had been part of the human experience since time began, the Triangle Trade provided an industrialized form of cultural extinction. Ethnic tensions, always high within the Traditions, reached a new peak when the concept of "whiteness" – a state of skin-color-based superiority – began to take hold. As Hermetics and Choristers, many of whom embraced the concept of personal and cultural superiority, enjoyed personal and political fortune throughout the era, the "mongrel" Verbena (whose Latinate plural *ae* dropped out in favor of a simpler *a*), the "disreputable" Seers and Thanatoics, and especially the "racially inferior" Dreamspeakers, Batini, and Akashics all drew further away from their aristocratic cousins. Over a third of the Dreamspeakers left the Council during this period, further marginalizing the Tradition. The remaining shamans drew closer to the Ecstatics and witch-folk... but not without huge misgivings and deepening suspicions.

In a way, these divisions created a vibrant age of Otherworldly magick. Each faction shaped Horizon Realms for its own purposes, and some of those Realms helped preserve their vanishing cultures. The price, however, was a period of stagnation and dissent within the Council of Eight.

And in that void, an age of Reason and Madness grew...

Chaos and Transgression

Corruption and insanity, like slavery, are nothing new. Before the Light and Order existed, after all, there were endless Void and Chaos. The *Nephandi* – who draw their collective name from the Latin word *nefas* ("transgression") and the ancient Mesopotamian sect called the *Nif' ur 'en Daah* ("Eaters of the Dead") had existed for millennia by the Age of Conquest. That age, however, gave them a deep hold on power. Pride breeds hubris; wealth breeds iniquity. The callousness that came from enslaving or destroying the people of whole continents provided a fertile ground for Nephandic influence. By the time mortal authorities detected the cults and Black Masses in their midst, it was far too late to dig out their fangs.

Madness prospered too, in the cracks of civilization. The *Marauders* (named from *maraud*, a French word for a high-spirited tomcat), who've always been present at the edges of civilization, began to make their presence more widely known. Once solitary, these demented enchanters now clustered into groups of shared insanity. In the madness of the age, these entities seemed strangely appropriate; what better mascot could there be, after all, for nations that burned people alive for entertainment while proclaiming themselves the pinnacle of civilization?

In the seas and forests of the new world, European nations and their cast-offs jockeyed for accomplishment. Pirates and privateers filled the oceans; scouts and outlaws plumbed the wilderness. Native cultures dug in and fought hard for their vanishing lands; the rush of guns, germs, and steel, however, drove them further toward near-extinction. Forests once held sacred by the Druids got cut down and turned into ships. A new magickal lineage, often called the *Bata'a*, came together from the fusion of African captives, European masters, and Native American medicine-folk. Older groups, like the Ngoma, seemed to disappear into the grinder – sometimes assimilated, like the Madzimbabwe, into other sects, other times vanishing in the headlong rush toward a more civilized world.

Sorcerers, Tinkers, and Heretics

Meanwhile, the centuries of religious warfare and persecution finally began to wind down. Such carnage was, of course, unreasonable in the eyes of enlightened (and Enlightened) men. Science, philosophy, and the arts had more to offer, they insisted, than weekly burnings in the city square. As innovations like the printing press spread literacy across Europe and its colonies, the Order of Reason began to move itself – and its influence – from sacred fervor to worldly logic. The fiery Renaissance became an Enlightenment... at least as far as white, European males were concerned, anyway.

As the witch-fires dwindled across the continent, secret societies flourished: the *Rosicrucians*, *Freemasons*, the *Poro Society*, and far, far more. Most of them remained in unAwakened hands, but a few harbored Awakened mages and Enlightened craftsmen. In the shadow of a dawning *Age of Reason*, occult fascinations bloomed. Every court, it seemed, had sorcerers and tinkers and heretics to spare.

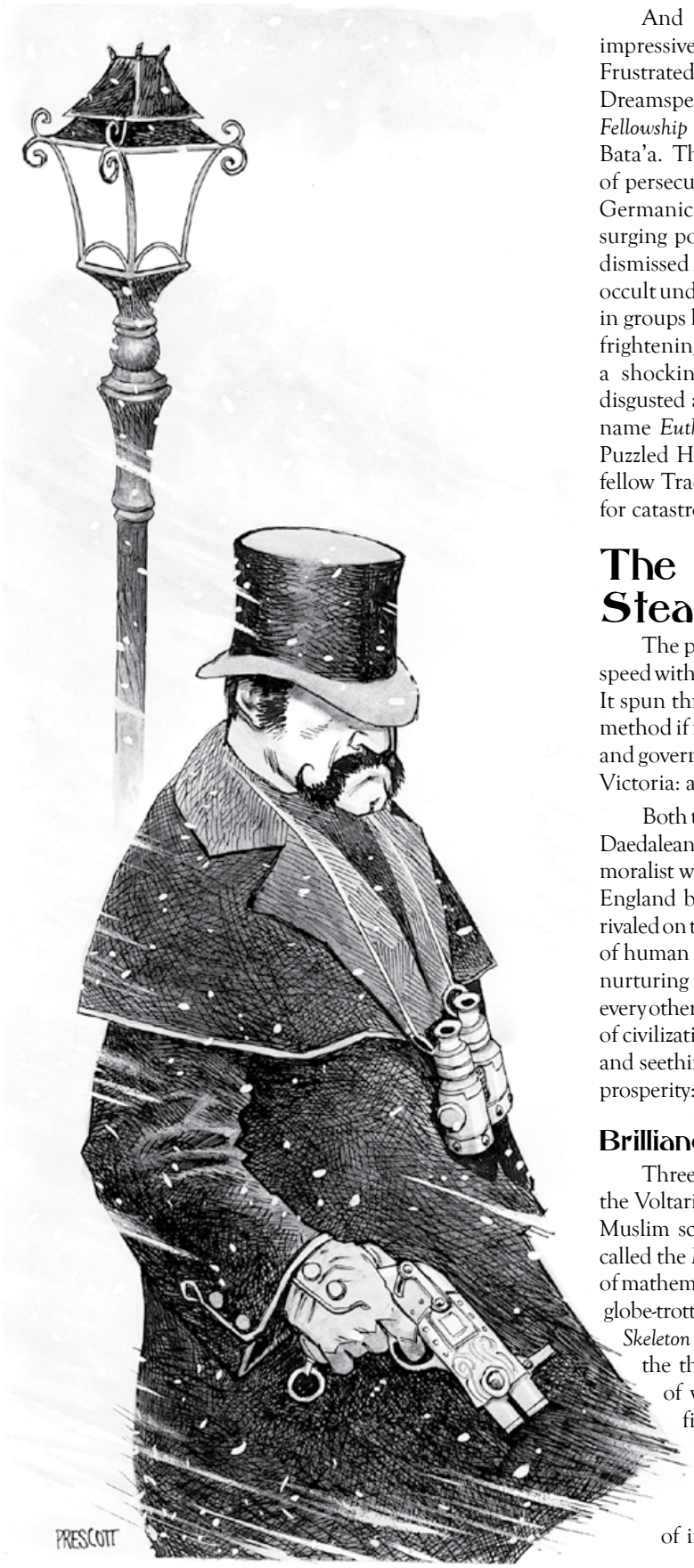
These societies presented a perfect harbor for *Crafts*: disparate sects that resisted consolidation into either the Traditions or the Order of Reason. The rolls of such groups ranged from a handful of members (like the *Sisters of Hippolyta*, who preserved the ancient Goddess ways) to hundreds of members scattered throughout loose networks (like the *Children of Knowledge*, who thrived in their secret prosperity). In later days, the mighty Wu Lung will be considered such a group; at this time, though, they still retained Imperial favor and an apparent mandate from the Sons of Heaven. Their power, though, was ebbing as a result of their endless conflict with the Metal Dragons, who would soon replace them in the seats of power.

Throughout the Muslim world, the Ottomans and their Court of Sacred Sciences overtook their Iranian and Mughal rivals. Like the spreading Christian empires, the Ottomans employed a mixture of technology, religion, philosophy, and brute force to absorb or conquer everyone in their path. Even so, the riches plundered from the Americas (and the ships built from American forests) gave the Christian powers an edge. As the 1600s gave way to the 1700s, England, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, and the rising powers of Russia and Germany planted their flags across the world.

There was opposition, of course. The Zulu, the Cherokee, the Iroquois Confederacy (inspired, in part, by the First Cabal's Dream-Speaker, Walking Hawk), and the Hindu Maratha Empire that finally displaced the Indian Mughal dynasties... these cultures, and others, gave the larger empires pause. China declined, but Japan prospered, becoming powerful enough to shut itself off from the "great game" that was swallowing the rest of the world. In time, these cultures will become fodder for boys' adventure tales, wherein supposedly brave white men subdue so-called barbaric foreigners. Between the early 1700s and early 1900s, though, they were powerful forces that slowed, if not stopped, the raging tide of empires.

Meanwhile, the Guild, Artificers, Cosians, and Explorators dominated the Order of Reason. *Everywhere*, it seemed, needed their gold, swords, ships, medicines, and guns. More subtle methods demanded the soft words and sharp knives of Guildsmen and Ksirafai. High adventure and treachery defined the age. The Craftmasons and Cabal of Pure Thought had their influence, but that power had begun to wane. The Celestial Masters had shown just how vast our world truly is, and the medieval ideals behind the Gabrielites and Crafters began to seem rather quaint... and ultimately obsolete.

Perhaps the *American Revolution* – a sure display of Craftmason power backed by Gabrielite fervor – was meant to send a message to the Order of Reason as a whole. If so, its sequels in Haiti and France a few years later provided the Order with an excuse for drastic renovation. By the 1800s, the Order had instituted a *Time Table* of progress and innovation. World dominion seemed not only desirable but possible. Medieval names gave way to industrial titles: Artificers became *Mechanicians*; the High Guild became an array of incorporated *Proctor Houses*; an eclectic fraternity of inventors and theorists took up the name *Voltarians*, and an *Ivory Tower* began to form within the Order... with ominous results for several Daedalean factions.



And through it all, the Council floundered, making impressive Horizon Realms but losing ground on Earth. Frustrated Batini declared the Council an *obstacle* to unity. Dreamspeakers defected to join groups like the Cherokee *Fellowship of the Oath*, the Zulu *Lion Masters*, and the growing Bata'a. The Akashic Brotherhood, depleted after centuries of persecution, seemed too remote for practical matters, and Germanic Verbena left the Council in order to enjoy the surging power of their home culture. The Seers – now often dismissed as mere *Cultists of Ecstasy* – flourished in Europe's occult underground, but they also joined their Hindu brethren in groups like the *Grand Tiger Society*, the *Kalika Rajas*, and the frightening *Aghoris*. Once moderators, these Cultists attained a shocking militaristic edge... an edge matched by their disgusted allies in the Chakravanti, now favoring their Greek name *Euthanatos* and a bloody approach to defiant magick. Puzzled Hermetics and distressed Choristers dismissed their fellow Traditions as hot-blooded amateurs. The stage was set for catastrophe.

The Triumph of Steam and Steel

The purge began with an *Industrial Revolution*; it picked up speed with the revolts in America, Haiti, France, and elsewhere. It spun through the conquests of Napoleon – a technocrat in method if not Enlightenment, who refined technologies of war and government – and ascended a throne in the form of Queen Victoria: another technocrat whose influence defined an age.

Both the Traditions and Technocracy considered Victoria a Daedalean Master. Mortal histories presented her as a melancholy moralist with devastating civil acumen. Under her governance, England became the most powerful nation on Earth – rarely rivaled on the battlefield and commanding respect in every sphere of human achievement. Victoria's England spanned the globe, nurturing factories, armies, and international corporations that every other nation emulated. This was *not*, of course, the pinnacle of civilization – it was a filthy, polluted realm of horrific poverty and seething oppression. Victoria's age, though, defined a new prosperity: a *triumph of steam and steel*.

Brilliance and Betrayal

Three new technocratic sects defined this era: from within the Voltarian group came a wild hybrid of Hermetic mysteries, Muslim scholarship, European ingenuity, and defiant hubris called the *Electrodyne Engineers*; a quiet but visionary association of mathematical malcontents begat the *Difference Engineers*; and a globe-trotting pack of rowdy aristocrats who called themselves the *Skeleton Keys* joined the nascent Ivory Tower faction. Between the three of them, these fellowships embodied the spirit of wild invention, calculating foresight, and righteous fisticuffs. Compared to them, the grumbling Gabrielites and indignant Craftmasons felt like embarrassing throwbacks from a less-Enlightened age.

Even as it pushed its mystic rivals toward the edge of insignificance, the Order of Reason was showing its

Czar Vargo's Crusade

It almost worked. It *might* have worked. If the Etherite idealist called Czar Vargo had not dared too much and gone too far in his attempt to stop the First World War, the 20th century might have been a very different place. But when Vargo's airship armada darkened skies across the world in 1914, armed with devices that could theoretically deactivate every modern weapon on Earth, he stepped over reality's threshold... and disappeared over it as well.

After a huge flash, the entire armada vanished. Every man, woman, and device went *elsewhere*. Czar Vargo, his followers, and whatever technologies they had planned to employ all ceased to exist. Most records and memories of that event disappeared as well; the few that remained behind were inconclusive, contradictory, and often absurd. It's as if the entire day had rewound itself, producing faint ghosts of its events but obliterating the actual parties involved.

The Society of Ether maintains that Czar Vargo was destroyed by the Technocracy, with all accounts of his adventures written out of existence by the New World Order. Such an event, however, seems beyond the reach of even the greatest Technocratic influence. It's more likely that Reality itself swallowed Czar Vargo. And if that's true, then perhaps the entire century that followed has been the greatest Paradox backlash in history.

Talk about good intentions leading to hell.

age. The reigning Masters were centuries old – aberrations to their own sense of logical propriety. The religious zealots had become tiresome, and the blood they'd spilled over the last six or seven centuries seemed, at best, counterproductive to the cause of Reason. Money and trade appeared to be the true measures of reality in this expanding world – truer than God, more productive than dogma, able to build empires in the image of Man, building over the bones of supposedly more primitive cultures.

The Order of Reason was done with quaint superstitions and divisive religious nonsense. It had had enough of rival empires and technologies. The last few centuries had shown that unity could be imposed through force... and so, in the shadows of Victoria's influence, the Order of Reason became the *Technocratic Union*.

A series of meetings and alliances linked the European Order, the Chinese Dragons, and rising technocratic sects in the new-formed United States. The Ottomans were invited to the table as well, but a schism between secular Muslim technocrats and pious Muslim artisans cracked the Court of Sacred Sciences... which, of course, was exactly what the European Guildsmen intended. As this effort came together, the Proctor House Coalition led the revolution. Wielding a potent form of the Art of Desire, these money men made secret deals for the Order's future: global wealth, global influence, global power... and an end to those annoying religious zealots who'd held back progress for so long.

All the records of the meetings wound up "lost" or "revised." All the parties involved were soon dead or deeply hidden. But in a series of quick strokes, the Craftmasons, Gabrielites, and other "superstitionists" were deposed. Outside historians called this the *Lightning Purge*: a quick, brutal war between technocratic factions. As the 20th century began, the Lightning Purge illuminated a New World Order. *Science*, not *faith*, determined its path from then on.

In place of the old Daedalean Conventions, a new array of groups took up the Technocratic mantle: *Iteration X*, a computerized refinement of the Mechanicians; the *Progenitors*, who melded the Cosian explorations in biological life with the potential for advanced evolution; the *Void Engineers*, who forged the old Explorators and Celestial Masters into a single pioneering entity; the *New World Order* that consolidated apparent leadership under Reason and Control; the Electrodyne and Difference Engineers; and the *Syndicate* – the *syndics* ("ones who represent") of these new Technocratic interests — who, behind a screen of money and indulgence, formed the new Order's true leadership. The Ivory Tower replaced the sinister, outmoded Ksirafai. That last group disappeared, its apparent purpose finally fulfilled.

How did it all happen so quickly? How were the Craftmasons and Gabrielites virtually exterminated? When did the Cabal of Pure Thought – a group dedicated to religious orthodoxy – drive God out of the Machine? And how, folks wondered, did a group of atheistic European upstarts turn Muslim, Taoist, and Confucian Masters to their cause?

Such radical transitions could almost be considered... magical.

End of an Age

As industrial empires ground the common people between the gears, flickers of defiance ignited a new fascination with occult pursuits. Mystic orders suddenly seemed to be *everywhere*. Could this have been the Order of Hermes playing a long game throughout the various secret societies? They'll certainly take credit for doing so. Ecstatic artists danced through the bohemian bacchanals of Europe's *fin de siécle* ("end of the century"), or else fought on the edges of the American frontier as *Los Sabios Locos* ("the Crazy Wise Ones"). The sickening pollution and crushing despair of this industrial victory fed Thanatoic fervor... especially once the *Great War* and the *Great Influenza Epidemic* initiated the monumental death tolls of the budding century. The Akashayana found a new sense of purpose in a *Boxer Rebellion* that recalled their Red Turban victories, and the Celestial Chorus recruited new devotees in North and South America. The Verbena, too, thrived in the occult revival and artistic rebellions of the time, as the term *neo-pagan* – originally an insult – became a mark of honor. Appalled by the destructions of African and Native American cultures, the Dreamspeakers adopted a quietly evangelical

defiance; though many folks – their allies included – took this pose as some form of "noble savage" serenity, it masked a powerful, subversive Will. Only the Batini seemed to give up hope; disgusted with the Council's divisive stagnation, that Tradition walked out shortly after the turn of the century. By then, however, another group had joined the ranks.

The Electrodyne Engineers played a vital role in the Lightning Purge, their machines crushing Gabrielite resistance and Craftmason Arts. Soon afterward, though, the Technocratic Inner Circle tried to rein in the proud inventors. Announcing that the Ether – a foundation element to Electrodyne High Science – did not actually exist, the Inner Circle used new mass-communication technology to put the Etherites in their place. As a result, the Engineers quit the new Technocratic Union in 1904 and joined the Traditions under their old nickname, the *Sons of Ether*.

To say that this didn't go over well is an understatement.

For decades, the industrial powers and their associated Technocrats had tested their deadliest devices on people they called primitive savages and rebellious country boys. Every so often, an army would toss some new innovation at a rival's troops to see what it might do. No one, however, was ready for what happened when two Union-backed superpowers hauled out their biggest guns. It started when a newly-industrialized Japan crossed guns with Tsarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese prelude to the coming horror show. A few years later, Victoria's house of cards collapsed in the grind of the First World War. By the time it ended... and that influenza pandemic racked up another 20 million dead... the true scope of Technocratic atrocity had been revealed.

The Sorcerers Crusade had been wild. The Lighting Purge had been incredible. The various plagues and wars and collapsing empires and civil wars brought their share of misery. No one, however, had seen *anything* like the mechanized genocide surrounding the Great War: tanks, planes, poison gas, machine guns, cannons that could pound a city from *an entire county away*, and a generation of men and women whose minds and bodies had been shattered even when their bodies had not quite died. It seems as though some epic, awful magic had taken hold of humanity. And the worst was still to come...

Roar

In the wake of global war and plague, the so-called *Lost Generation* dove into the occult revival. Spiritualism, secret orders, radical art movements, Pagan reclamation, and militant atheism all provided willing initiates for cults both Awakened and otherwise. The Technocracy shook itself off and sorted through the carnage, often missing the rising power of Hermetics, Choristers, Ecstatics, Thanatoics, and even Akashics. There were, after all, plenty of distractions in this "roaring" era, most obviously the Russian Revolution, the collapse of Imperial China, the rapid rise of Imperial Japan, and the anti-German backlash in Europe... a backlash that inspired the horrors to come.

As Technocratic experiments in Italy, the United States and Russia took hold, growing numbers of *Hollow Ones* swelled the ranks of the Awakened. Forsaking all forms of old wisdom, these people slipped between the cracks of both Traditions and Technocracy. Although they would be seen in later years as bored Goth kids, the orphaned Hollowers were a true 20th-century mystic tradition... a fact the Council would ignore at great cost later. Disdained by lofty mystics as "self-Awakened rabble," the Hollowers found themselves treated as recruiting stock and cannon fodder. The treatment didn't sit well with them.

Throughout the *Roaring '20s*, mages of all factions built their influence. New mass-media technologies helped smart mages

The Rise of the Extraordinary Citizen

Mages of all factions who expected to lead a sheeplike humanity toward their pasture of choice have been shaken by what the New World Order calls *the rise of the extraordinary citizen*: a revolution in capability, conviction, and belief among the Masses.

Whereas the fashionable apathy of the 1990s suggests a stagnation of human potential, the literally explosive events at the turn of the new millennium spotlight the very opposite idea. Although certain elements of consumeristic society scarf down Happy Meals and junk culture, the combination of political unrest, technological savvy, mystic romanticism, and religious convictions ignite worldwide upheavals. Across the world, unprecedented numbers of people *employ* technology and yet *believe* in magic. This apparent small-p paradox has shifted the tide of the Ascension War. At the same time that longtime mystics incorporate computer-tech into their lives and rituals, idealistic Technocrats find themselves craving spiritual fulfillment. The so-called Sleepers, meanwhile, have proved themselves to be active agents of both sides, using over-the-counter technology to craft magical visions. From boy wizards to romantic Night-Folk, apocalyptic sagas and CGI superheroism, the pop-culture stew of this millennium fusion represents an embrace of all sides of the Ascension conflict.

In short, no one side is winning, but all of them – the Marauders included – have a chance at capturing a worldwide Consensus.

The extraordinary citizens of the new millennium are neither the trembling peasants of medieval legend nor the conforming Masses of Technocratic ideals. Instead, they... or, to be more accurate, *WE*... embrace a vibrant era in which technology, faith, and imagination coexist. The shadow of that era, though, is the potential for global madness and self-inflicted annihilation.

And that choice, ultimately, lies not with one Awakened faction or the other, but with the extraordinary citizens of the 21st century.

spread beliefs and shape realities. The Etherites might have been the most astute students of film, magazines, newspapers, sound recordings, and radio, but they weren't the only ones. Even the Great Beast, Aleister Crowley, experimented with recorded rituals, somehow managing to be considered a member of almost every mystic group while never definitively appearing in a single Awakened Tradition.

The ugly aftermath of war... and the even uglier global *Great Depression*... divided both the Council and the Union. The post-War disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the technological hunger of a dozen imperial powers – combined with social upheavals and the partitioning of Africa and Asia into European "possessions" – kept tensions rising in this volatile age. Was the American dust bowl a legacy of magickal war? Were the many strikes and riots instigated by Awakened factions? Who was *really* running the organized crime families sweeping across the USA... and what was the truth behind those rumors about the KKK hunting Dreamspeakers and Bata'a? Where did the Subtle Ones go, and was the world headed toward a dreadful Age of Iron? As the '20s and '30s lurched toward another World War, mysteries were everywhere.

One thing, in hindsight, is obvious: the Fallen are playing chess with our world.

The Crucible

From the newsreels, it looked marvelous: Germany, Italy, and the newcomers in Japan all seemed vital and full of hope. Their machines were among the finest on Earth, their people well-fed and disciplined. Eloquent leaders inspired grand devotion. It looked like a Technocratic dream come true – the shining face of Tomorrow.

We all know what happened next.

World War II split the Traditions and Technocracy; mages on both sides joined the Axis or the Allies. Although a few mystics ran and hid, most folks understood just how high the stakes were. As atrocities came to light and proud, supposedly Enlightened Axis leaders were revealed as monsters, the truth became obvious: the Nephandi had gone for all the marbles, and they very well might have won.

It was an age of Paradox – a cosmic Armageddon of mythic proportions. Magick and machines clashed from one end of Earth to another. Only South America was truly spared. German mystics of the *Thule Gesellschaft* clashed with *Doc Eon's Terrific Trio*. The Japanese *Bloody Pillar* and *Fiery Wind Brigade* battled the Thanatoic/ Dreamspeaker/ Ecstatic sect called the *Ghost Tigers* and the Akashic *Whispering Fists*. The Difference Engineers – by this time called the *Virtual Adepts* – broke Technocratic ranks and helped the British High Command crack mystic German codes. A different sort of code came from the American *Wind Talkers*, whose ties to the Dreamspeakers were obvious from their name. Perhaps the bitterest divide pitted the Verbena Tradition against itself; for a Tradition whose founding members were a British witch and a Germanic runesman, that split held the tragedy of Wagnerian opera.

For a time, the Technocratic leadership stood behind the Axis war machine. As the extent and nature of the horrors became unavoidable, however, the Inner Circle joined the rank-and-file Technocrats who'd turned against the Axis. The technical acumen behind the Allied powers, most especially Russia and the U.S., shifted the balance of power. Hitler's forces found their gadgets malfunctioning, their proud machine sputtering, their innovations stagnating or exploding in bright flashes of Paradox. In an unprecedented move, high-ranking Technocrats met with Council Masters in late 1943; now united, the two factions crushed the Thule Society, the *Midnight Wolves* (a remnant of the Daedalean Wolf Guild), and the *Shadowed Sun Society* – Nephandic cores of Nazi power. Although certain Technocrats and Tradition mages hung on until the end, that end was almost certain.

In retrospect, the detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki could be seen as titanic Paradox backlashes. But perhaps they were the opening volleys of a terrifying endgame...

To Dream Impossible Things

Like the alliance between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-American west, the truce between Technocrats and Traditions soon became a ferocious standoff. World War II had given both sides plenty of new toys and reasons to use them. The Traditions, energized for the first time in centuries, expanded into the post-War vacuum. The Technocracy seized upon the Atom Age as a chance to take its ideals worldwide. The defection of the Virtual Adepts in 1961 brought the Council back to its original count of nine; the Adepts also brought with them a welcome burst of futuristic inspiration. Combined with the Sons of Ether, the new Tradition brought the Council firmly into this wild century.

As the counterculture blazed up in the 1960s, the Traditions seized their place in popular culture. War-weary Sleepers craved rebellion, spirituality, and wonder; the Traditions were happy to provide such things. Long-oppressed people and cultures threw off their colonial chains, bringing lost Arts back to the global stage. And so, despite a growing *Pogrom* from the Technocratic Union, mystic mages built a power base through pop culture, the *civil rights push*, imaginative technology, and various spiritual and religious movements. Throughout the coming decades, the Traditions and Technocracy faced off in bloody struggles for supremacy – each side driven to fulfill Ascension, both too proud to see their own damnation.

Folly and pride have shaped a World of Darkness. Instead of Ascending, the people suffer. Despite magnificent achievements, the human animal is a caged beast at war with itself. The monsters moving through the night are mere reflections of the human heart, and as a Reckoning draws close, the true winners of this Ascension War become clear to everyone except the mages fighting it.

The 1990s foretell an Apocalypse – a Reckoning of sin, destiny, and punishment. Forces gather and converge in monumental showdowns. Strongholds fall. Masters perish.

Future Fates: The Reckoning and Sixth Age

The late 1990s prove disastrous for the Traditions. In the metaplot between the **Mage 2nd** and **Revised** Editions:

- Hermetic rivalries tear Doissetep apart, the Thanatoic Master Voormas goes rogue, and the Ascension Warrior leads an army of angry young mages into Horizon and essentially levels the place during the *Horizon War*.
- In a *Second Massassa War*, the Order of Hermes goes to war with vampires, to the vast expense of all parties.
- During a *Week of Nightmares* in early June, 1999, some sort of godlike monster rises in Bangladesh; the Technocracy nukes the Indian subcontinent, and the spirit nukes (see **Chapter Four**) unleash the *Avatar Storm* and other metaphysical disasters.
- Not long after that, a Technocratic force wipes out what's left of Horizon, killing most of the surviving elders and obliterating the Council's home. The Council Primi disappear, leaving the Traditions leaderless. Those combined catastrophes set the Nine Traditions reeling. The Technocracy intensifies its Pogrom, and – by the opening of the new millennium – the Ascension War is declared over. The Disparate Crafts are hunted down and supposedly destroyed, their few survivors fleeing to what's left of the Traditions. The Technocracy, also in disarray as Earthbound Technocrats get cut off from their Deep Universe Constructs by the Avatar Storm's *Dimensional Anomaly*, winds up presiding over an apparently apathetic human race.
- Following the cataclysms of *9/11/ 2001*, humanity appears to go insane. Religious fantatics spark wars on every continent. Defiant Tradition mages soon discover an enigmatic *Rogue Council*, but they cannot decipher or trust its source. The Reckoning arrives, and a final Sixth Age is underway.

Given this literally game-changing metaplot, a **Mage** Storyteller has three options:

- **Things are now as they'd been in *Mage Revised*:** The Technocracy commands the world. Sleepers just want Big Macs and TV shows. The Disparates are gone and the Traditions remain a small, defiant force. The Avatar Storm's still in effect, confining most activity to Earth. The Sixth Age continues to rain blood and misery, and mystic magick draws Paradox by default.
- **The Technocracy's victory party was premature:** Sure, the Union got the upper hand, but the Traditions and Disparates have survived worse. Hubris leads most Technocrats to consider the fight more or less over... and to miss the Nephandic leadership now governing their every move. The Masses surprise everyone with their combination of self-indulgence, fanaticism, and hope for a better tomorrow. The Traditions rally once again, and the Disparates band together to take back their world. Loyal Technocrats who've discovered the Inner Circle's corruption stage a shadow-war within the Union, possibly allying with Tradition and Disparate sects in an effort to rescue the ideals of science from Nephandic infiltration. At the moment, though, the Fallen are winning what's left of the Ascension War. It's like WWII all over again, with even higher stakes.
- **None of that ever happened:** As in the mid-1990s, the Technocracy and Traditions are more or less equal, with the Nephandi mostly banished from Earth and the Marauders too scattered to provide much threat. The Disparates have their own territory, but the cataclysms that pushed **Ascension** to the edge have not occurred and probably never will.

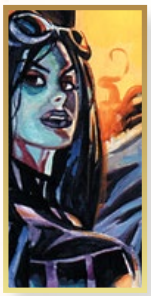
Mage 20 assumes the second scenario. The final choice, however, is yours to make. Who knows? Perhaps the Sixth Age *did* occur, the old world *did* end, and the current world is just one alternate reality of many. Reality's a funny thing, especially in the world of **Mage**, and it's often not what you'd expect...

Technocratic agents spot deep corruption in their ranks – a Nephandic poison that infects the Inner Circle itself. As wars destroy Horizon Realms, their echoes shake things back on Earth. Fanatics and madmen rape the world with fire. Magic is as close as the nearest Internet connection, but its miracles seem petty, small, and mean. And so, as the Twin Towers burn and fall, a bright Dark Age begins – a wonderland of impossible things bent on self-destruction.

Mages, however, have always specialized in doing the impossible. Ascension, though delayed, cannot be denied. Horizons might burn and Crafts might shatter, but True Magick never dies. The *new millennium* ushers in a culture-jam. Tech, religion, and mystic fantasy remix one another's elements until no preconception remains intact. There's hope in the wind and revolution in the air again.

In an age of revelations, the Ascension War goes on.

Part II: The Council of Nine Mystick Traditions



Oh, Porthos – you glorious old fool.

The fragments from Doissetep rest in gold-embroidered silk, set in the center of a pentacular design of intricacy that would make King Solomon weep with confusion. My throat aches from six straight hours of chanting in three separate tongues: Hebrew, Old Nubian, and – of course – Enochian, the Renaissance forgery that nevertheless contains power its con-man architect never recognized. Worn loose in the old style, my dreadlocks hang thick and heavy beside my face.

His own face freezes with indecision, then relaxes into a martyr's reverie.

That's the moment he decided. The moment that saved us all.

In the center of my pentacle, the spectre of that long-lost moment flickers, freed from the constraints of time and space. Ectoplasmic tendrils recreate the scene. Although no camera captured that penultimate decision, my Arts have freed it from the void. These fragments – precious beyond measure – echo back their memories. Although I know that I see only what I may expect to see, there's truth behind that vision. The spirits have told me so, and they know better than to lie to me.

I'm weary, yet fascinated. That so much depended on one man's resolve is awful in its implications.

He looks weary too. I hope to never live so long as to doubt my own sanity, as he so often did.

Archmaster Porthos of the Thousand Honorific Titles We Had To Memorize In Training hovers for a moment, a mad prophet face to face with destiny. He licks his lips for just a moment – such a human gesture! – before the mask of command slides down across his features. His skin takes on the solemnity of stone, like some ageless idol of bygone majesty. And then he opens his mouth to pour out the words of majesty, sealing the portals and letting Doissetep implode.

For an eternal breath, I stop speaking. Let the scene hover frozen, etching itself into my bones.

Perhaps it's my imagination, but I'd swear I see the face of Hermes' ghost itself over Porthos' features. Man, God, and Magus become one-in-three – a single entity, Thrice-Great squared. And then the image brightens to a blinding sun, and the moment disappears in flame.

I'd say that my tears come from that blinding flash, but I'd be lying if I did.

This is the moment we were reborn – the thunderbolt that lit the skies of Heaven and remade our universe anew.

A Legacy of Challenge

Ah, for the Age of Magick! A wondrous time with miracles close at hand! A smart, ambitious mage could do great things with his Arts – call storms, conjure spirits, raise castles out of stony ground, and shatter opposing armies with a wave of his mighty hand! That's the vision of the Nine Tradition mages… or of some of them, at least: a return to that bygone age when magick was a force of elemental change, and a mage could command Arts that would make the bravest men cry out in terror and lay still.

It's a wonderful dream – one that's kept the Nine Traditions going for over 500 years. The pride in their personal vision and ancestral Arts energizes these mages long past the point at which lesser souls would have given up. In many ways, these are the guardians of wonder, holding on to the best aspects of their history in order to give tomorrow a fighting chance. And yet, it's also a *selfish* vision, so bound by its own glory that its keepers often miss the cost of that dream to other people.

So are the Traditions brave saviors of a bygone wonder-age… or a misbegotten experiment led by throwbacks with selfish agendas and careless behavior? Honestly, *both* are true. Though it's accurate to say that Tradition mages fight the good fight against the Technocracy's stifling imperialism, it's just as accurate to call them reckless nutjobs who prefer candles to halogen lamps. The Nine Traditions' mystics *have* suffered appalling crackdowns at the hands of mortal witch-hunters and the Technocratic Union… and yet, two of their greatest disasters – the betrayal of the First Cabal and the fall of Doissetep – were both self-inflicted. Technocratic Explorators might have plundered the Americas while the High Guild ran the slave trade, but it was Hermetic Masters who marginalized the Dreamspeakers, pooh-poohed Akashic sages, and shattered a centuries-old alliance with the Ahl-i-Batin over the "white man's burden" in Africa and India. The Traditions make a lot of mistakes, have committed their share of atrocities, and hold a vision of Ascension that would leave most human beings screaming in terror. Are they the good guys, then? In the treacherous Awakened world, no mage is truly innocent and no faction is truly good. At best, they can live their lives by high ideals and use their powers to advance humanity as a whole without grinding human beings into the dirt.

That, then, is the challenge of a Tradition mage: to hold onto the best your group has to offer and make tomorrow better than yesterday has been.

A Proud Heritage

Despite their many mistakes, the Traditions have plenty to be proud of. For over half a millennium, the Council has championed diversity, cooperation, and mutual respect across cultural divides. This might not seem like much these days, especially not given the Council's many lapses when it comes to the Dreamspeakers in particular. Still, the wide range of people who've earned the title *Master* among the Traditions hasn't been limited by race or creed – only by accomplishment. During eras when witches were considered more suitable for kindling than companionship, when Catholics burned Protestants and both burned Jews, when white governments considered non-whites to be less than human (and women often even less than *that*),

the Council held every Tradition mage to the same standard: *be good at what you do, and do it well.*

Earth and Fire

Though it originated with nine auspicious members, the Council has spent most of its existence with eight Traditions. Considering that the number 8 signifies the mundane world (as opposed to the perfection of mind and spirit that 9 represents), it's understandable that the Traditions have so often fallen one step short of perfection. Still, 8 has cosmic significance too. There are eight paths to spiritual attainment, eight spokes in the Buddhist wheel, and eight petals in the lotus flower. 2 x 2 x 2 equals perfection in its third iteration and symbolizes the element of Earth. Perhaps the Council needed to be grounded before it could return to the bright significance of nine, whose third iteration, 3 x 3 x 3, equals the element of Fire.

Fire has certainly symbolized the Council since the Virtual Adepts joined in 1961. The infernos of the First and Second World Wars brought the Traditions back from the brink of stagnation, and the fires of rebellion heated their countercultural revolution. The explosive end of Doissetep, the ruin of Horizon, and the fires of the Technocratic purge all burned the fat away from the Nine Traditions. Hermetic mages equate the Tarot's Tower card with the destruction of Horizon and the self-immolation of Doissetep – all of them signifying the collapse of secure but stifling institutions. Going into the new millennium, the Nine Traditions are lean, mean, and ready to excel.

Although they're preserved some of the old formalities of their Renaissance origins, the Traditions prefer to live in today. Their rituals and tools might seem archaic at times, but their sensibilities are more modern than most folks realize. Despite a reputation for being cranky throwbacks (an accusation true of the oldest Masters but perhaps not of the current membership), Tradition mages are more dynamic than their Technocratic rivals. Their approach, too, is more classical and romantic. For better and worse, when you say "mage," most people think of the Traditions.

Common Goals and Ideals

Through centuries of conflict, certain principles have kept Tradition mages going. A Hermetic might snarl at the Cultist, fidget through Akashic meditations, roll his eyes whenever the Chorister starts sermonizing, and wonder what the *hell* that Adept sees in her stupid-ass computer. All five mages, though, probably share the following ideals:

Excellence

There's a reason the Council chose the word *arête* to represent a mage's highest quality. It means "excellence," and that's what the Council prizes most. *Anyone* can be a Tradition Master if she, he, or occasionally the gender-neutral pronoun *ze* works hard, strives to perfect the Arts, and stands by oaths, promises, and honor. Yes, Tradition mages lie, scheme, and fall short of their lofty goals; still, as far as the Council is concerned, the goal of excellence is the highest mortal aspiration. And so, Tradition members seek knowledge and endure hardships so that they might become more worthy of the title *mage*.

Diversity

From its inception onward, the Council of Traditions has held room for anyone who can meet those standards of excellence. Neither gender nor creed nor ethnicity has prevented the Traditions from accepting worthy Adepts. That's not to say they haven't been... well, *racist*, to be honest; especially with regards to the Dreamspeakers, they *have* been and in some regards still *are*. Considering the group's origins in medieval Europe, however, it has remained surprisingly diverse.

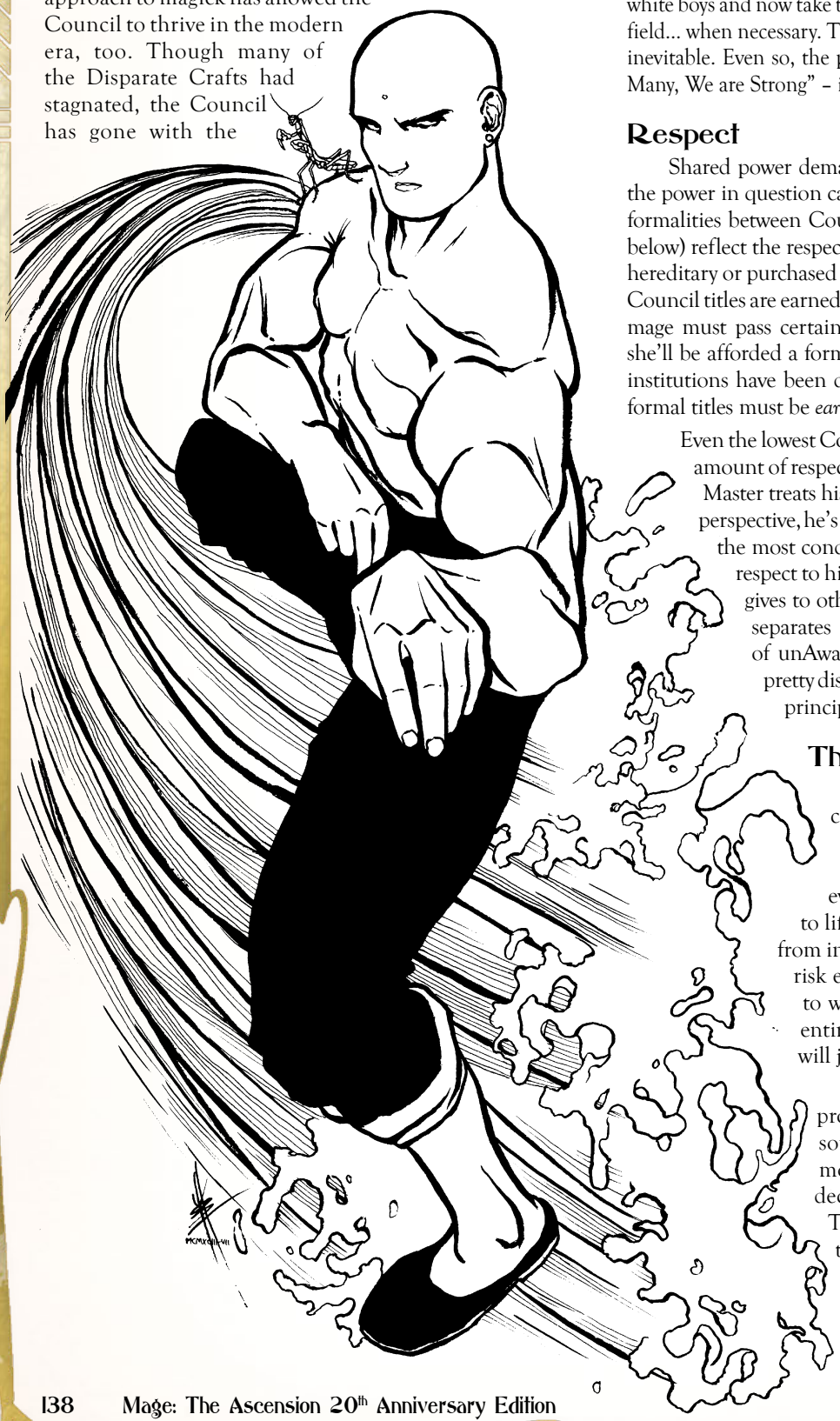
Unlike the monolithic Technocratic Union, the Traditions find strength in flexibility. They're the reed

Future Fates: The Traditions

Between **Mage 2nd** and **Mage Revised**, the Council goes from a powerful entity with Otherworldly strongholds and godlike Masters to a struggling collection of survivors whose greatest assets have been lost. Thus, the status of Tradition characters and their groups will depend enormously on the option you choose to employ:

- **Defiant survivors:** The Technocracy won, Horizon is lost, and the few remaining Tradition mages keep their heads down and hide amongst the Sleepers. Even so, the Sphinx's Rogue Council (see below) has taken the fight back to the Technocracy. Though seriously outgunned, these defiant survivors continue to wage a guerilla war against the Technocratic monolith.
- **The Council transforms:** In a new-millennium chronicle, this Rogue Council has been around for about 10 years, granting the Traditions a significant comeback. Horizon and Doissetep are distant memories, but new strongholds have replaced them. The Rogue Council has inspired (perhaps even created) the *New Horizon Council* (again, see below), and several Traditions – notably the Akashics, Dreamspeakers, Ecstatics, Etherites, and Thanatoics – have assumed new identities that reflect their renewed sense of purpose. **Mage 20** assumes this option in the following entries.
- **Metaplot? *What* metaplot?:** None of that stuff happens, Horizon and Doissetep remain vital, and the Traditions can go toe-to-toe with the Technocracy and even possibly win. The chronicle follows **Mage** sourcebooks published between 1993 and 1998, with a "**Mage 2nd** Default" sort of tone. Alternately, it simply ignores *all* of the metaplot, leaving the Traditions the floating powers that they are in **Mage 1st Edition**. The Traditions remain unchanged and will probably stay that way.

bundle, not the oak. A diverse approach to life and magick has kept the Traditions supple... which might be why the group has endured its many challenges. When one mage or Tradition falters, the others take up the strain; when one prospers, the rest often share the benefits. That heterodox approach to magick has allowed the Council to thrive in the modern era, too. Though many of the Disparate Crafts had stagnated, the Council has gone with the changing spirit of the times, riding the 20th century into a powerful... if precarious... state of the Art.



These days, the Traditions are more diverse than ever. As the older wizards die off, their colonial legacy fades as well. Other mages, meanwhile, have refused to take any further shit from musty old white boys and now take their issues to the table... or the certámen field... when necessary. There *are* still problems, of course – that's inevitable. Even so, the principle of *Valemus ex pluribus* – "From Many, We are Strong" – is a long-standing Council tradition.

Respect

Shared power demands mutual respect... especially when the power in question can literally turn people inside out. The formalities between Council members (see ***Ranks and Titles***, below) reflect the respect each member has earned. Unlike the hereditary or purchased ranks so common in the mortal realm, Council titles are earned through accomplishment. A Tradition mage must pass certain tests and master certain Arts before she'll be afforded a formal title. Even now, when so many old institutions have been discarded due to progress or necessity, formal titles must be *earned*, not *assumed*.

Even the lowest Council ranks, however, are due a certain amount of respect under Council law. Sure, an arrogant Master treats his companions like shit – from a certain perspective, he's earned the right to do so. That said, even the most condescending wizard tends to grant more respect to his fellow mages or loyal acolytes than he gives to other mere mortals. The label "Sleepers" separates a Tradition member from the mass of unAwakened humanity, and although that's pretty dismissive of the masses, it also reflects the principle of respect within the Council itself.

The Sleepers

Enlightenment's a funny thing: it can blind you to so-called little things like human suffering, yet it can also open your eyes and heart so wide that every bit of suffering becomes an affront to life itself. And so, Council mages range from incredibly compassionate people who'll risk everything to soothe a stranger's pain, to war-machines who'll grind through an entire neighborhood because the residents will just get reincarnated anyway.

Ideally, the Council was formed to protect the common people from rival sorcerers. To a point, that ideal involves more marketing than reality. Protocol declares, "Protect the Sleepers," so most Tradition members do. Beyond that, though, there's a sense of responsibility to the unAwakened world, if only because the Council knows how much magick depends on people and their belief in it.

Fallen Traditions?

Although the Traditions stand firm in their apparent integrity, a persistent rumor has latched onto the group as a whole, making occasional rounds late at night, when inhibitions loosen and secrets spill out: *the Council Masters were Nephandi... and maybe they still ARE.*

Is it true? Probably not, but one never knows. It would certainly explain a few things:

- **The implosion of Doissetep**, which certain mages (Hermetic and otherwise) believe came about when Master Porthos discovered proof of the Fallen infestation and so wiped the entire Chantry out of existence. Or maybe *he* was corrupt and *someone ELSE* took Porthos out. The muddled records leave too many questions and too few answers.
- **The Ascension Warrior**, who's often considered a Nephandus but who might, instead, have recognized the Fallen infiltration of Horizon and its Council and thus led an army against it.
- **The betrayal of Horizon**, which might or might not have been committed by an ambassador of the Hollow Ones. **(**See the sidebar ***Hollow Treachery?*** in **Part IV**, **p. 201.)** Perhaps he knew something that the Traditions refused to recognize. Maybe that "Technocratic invasion" was actually a purge. Stranger things have happened...
- **The Helekar affair**, for obvious reasons. Sure, the Chakravanti *claim* that Voormas was simply corrupt, not Fallen, but why trust *them...?*
- **The Avatar Storm**, because it would explain *so much* if a bunch of Archmages had decided to cover their tracks by causing the greatest metaphysical cataclysm since the Great Flood.
- **The Second Massassa War**, because damn, wasn't *that* convenient?

And even if only some, or none, of these events happened in your chronicle, the various abuses for which Tradition Masters are infamous could certainly point to some degree of corruption at the Council's upper echelons. I mean, doesn't it seem odd that a pack of demigods with aspirations of greatness would throw lives and power at a futile crusade to bring back the Dark Ages?

The lower levels are clearly not immune, either. Maybe it's the *new* Tradition membership that's riddled with corruption. After all, when someone takes everything you've ever believed in and then throws it in a shredder and tells you to *just fucking DEAL with it,* wouldn't *you* look for help and comfort anywhere you could find it? Desperate situations call for desperate measures, and the Devil doesn't look so bad when he offers you a leg up from the Abyss.

It might be possible within your chronicle that the Nine Traditions are shot through with Nephandic corruption. A Technocracy-based chronicle could certainly work from that assumption, and a Disparate one could as well. An intriguing chronicle could be built from a joint venture between Tradition, Technocracy, and Disparate mages all working to root out Nephandic overlords within the Council of Nine. What sort of evidence could facilitate such an alliance, anyway... and how trustworthy could it be? Maybe the rumor of Nephandic infiltration is itself a Fallen tactic, meant to turn the Traditions against themselves. So many possibilities, so few definite answers...

A theme of Nephandic corruption within the Nine Traditions takes expectations and drops them on their collective head. Even if the rumors are wrong, the very *idea* could have massive implications. As **Part V** of this chapter reveals, such machinations are certainly appropriate for the Fallen. And although **Mage** has always assumed that the Traditions were the good guys, since when has **Mage** *ever* been about taking things at face value?

The Council generally frowns on coercion, too. Sleepers should be allowed to make their own decisions and find their own ways toward spiritual fulfillment. In the past, Tradition Masters *have* used their powers to compel belief or punish disobedience... and that past shames the Council as a whole. Especially for mages who come from cultures that have been oppressed and enslaved, the principle of free choice – even when that choice puts the Traditions on the wrong side of reality – is unshakable. "If we just forced the Sleepers to go along with us," goes the reasoning, "or simply drugged them until they followed our lead, we'd be no better than the *Technocrats*."

Magick

Even though certain technomancers have issues with the term, the idea of magick forms one of the Council's foundation principles. To most Traditionalists, magick is the Art and Science of transforming reality through Will and understanding. Though they often disagree about specific methods (in game terms, the *focus*; see the Tradition entries below, plus **Chapters Six**, (pp. 256-259), and **Ten**, (pp. 565-600), Tradition mages share a common belief: *you change reality because you know you CAN.*

For want of a better term, they agree to call this belief "magick."

This belief has carried the Council through its many trials and divisions. Even now, when advanced technology rules the world, Tradition mages retain their faith in magick. Sure, they'll use their own conflicting terms to define it... or even, in the case of the Etherites and Virtual Adepts, shake their collective heads at such a ridiculous term. Still, magick is the Council's core, the faith that unites it even beyond disaster.

Ascension

All those other elements lead to the bedrock upon which the Traditions stand: the ideal of Ascension. Though they all have different ideas about the specifics, Council members agree that an intersection of personal transcendence and the development of humanity is the highest aspiration of a mage. People deserve *better* than some wretched World of Darkness – more than sedation or oblivion. According to the Council, this broken shell of Creation *cannot* be the best we can achieve. And so – even when that ideal seems further away than ever before – the Traditions seek personal perfection and the betterment of man.

Organization and Law

Magick has laws. So do the Traditions. You can't have a collection of nigh-on demigods working together for 500 years without some serious organization. And although many of the older customs have fallen by the wayside – some from disuse, others from necessity, and still others because they were relics that needed to get tossed – the Council still maintains a code of respect, cooperation, and – when necessary – consequences.

For centuries, the Council operated along top-down lines:

- Nine ***Primi*** – personal representatives for the Traditions – met in ***Horizon***, the Council stronghold, providing the official governance for the Council as a whole.
- ***Chantries and Horizon Realms*** provided homes for the various mages and acolytes within the Traditions. Some, like Doissetep, were ancient and powerful, and others, like the Spy's Demise, provided new blood. Each Chantry had at least one cabal or council that ran the place, although some of the larger ones were plagued with vicious rivalries for the leadership position. Most Chantries had at least a tangential connection to Nodes and Realms, and although many favored a particular environment, group, or viewpoint, the vast majority of them provided common ground for members of various Traditions.
- ***Cabals*** formed within those Chantries, united by friendship, oaths, or common cause. Each cabal became a self-contained unit but usually answered – in turn – to the leaders of its Chantry, the Traditions of its members, and the Horizon Council that governed them all.

When (and *if*...) Horizon and the powerful Chantries fell, the smaller Chantries and cabals were left largely to their own discretion. For better and worse, each cabal or Chantry wound up governing itself. With each mage and cabal becoming a law unto itself, the old hierarchies became meaningless. Only ideals and, yes, *traditions* kept the entire concept alive.

As one might expect, the old hierarchies featured plenty of abuse. Powerful wizards literally got away with murder, and their younger or less powerful compatriots caught the brunt of punishment. However, the democratic ideals of the 19th and 20th centuries (along with the abuses that fostered them) undermine a lot of those original hierarchies, and the Council's setbacks around the turn of the millennium took out most of the rest. During the early 2000s, the Traditions operated in a state of near-anarchy, observing the old protocols only as far as individual mages or cabals could enforce them. After a rather internecine period, the surviving mages pulled together a structure that, in theory, mixes the best elements of the old Council with necessary reforms and an eye toward the future, rather than old burdens from the past.

Honorifics

It's an unwritten but understood law among Tradition mages: *give the respect that your fellows have earned.* This was especially important in the early days, when strangers from around the world forged an alliance despite rifts of sex, culture, creed, and language. In this new millennium, few mages care about such formality unless you're a Hermetic magus, a Chorister, an Akashic, or somebody dealing with one of them. Still, it's good idea to at least *understand* the established pecking order, especially when tradition is part of your identity.

During the Grand Convocation of the 1400s, the Traditions established a number of shared ranks and titles. Like negotiating enemies, these founders bestowed honorifics upon one another and then respected those titles, and the people who'd earned them, accordingly. A man might speak a strange language, have a different skin color, and worship gods that seem like devils to you, but that man was still Master So-and-So, *bani* Such-and-Such. Your culture might not accept women as equals, but if that woman was an Adept or Master of her Tradition, then she had earned the right to be your peer – possibly even your superior.

In the days of colonial oppression, these titles, and the honors attached to them, allowed mages to work together without killing one another... most of the time, anyway. As a result, although those titles have fallen out of favor in recent years, Tradition members still use them in formal settings or when settling disputes. Even in this democratic age, there are practical reasons to ritualize respect.

The Protocols and the Rule of Shade

Magick without conscience is a terrible thing. In order to sidestep the worst excesses of wizard-tyrants (and to punish them when necessary), the Convocation established Tradition Protocols that would apply to all members equally. As with any set of laws, the "equally" part has turned out to be rather flexible over the years. Even so, the following rules have lasted over five centuries. Younger mages might snicker at the archaic verbiage, but the principles behind these laws are clear enough.

Tradition mages who break minor Protocols are usually dealt with by their group's elders. Serious violations, however, may be brought before a formal *Tribunal*. In the absence of strong organization and Master mages, such Tribunals are pretty rare, so serious offenders might simply be killed by their cabalmates if they step too far out of line.

Respect those of Greater Knowledge.

Considered to be common sense, this Protocol is based on the idea that knowledge is both value and power.

Ranks and Titles

Although many individual mages, and even some Traditions, treat these titles as optional formalities, the following honorifics provide an essential legacy of status and respect within the group as a whole.

- **Oracle:** A mythic mage who's transcended Earthly existence and now hovers between full Ascension and imperfect mortality. Essentially a bodhisattva or a saint, an Oracle is more than a person and less than a divinity.
- **Primus:** "First One;" refers both to the original founders of the Nine Traditions and the living representatives of those groups today.
- **Archmaster:** A powerful magus whose mastery of the Spheres displays lifetimes' worth of study and practice. Always a rare breed, Archmasters are practically mythic these days. Referred to among Etherites as a **Master Scientist**.
- **Master:** An accomplished magus whose skill, Arts, and perseverance have earned great respect among that mage's peers. Depending upon your metaplot, Masters might be few and far between these days. In Etherite terminology, a **Doctor**.
- **Adept:** A mage who's displayed significant skill with the mystic Arts. Often called a **Professor** among the Etheric Tradition.
- **Disciple:** An established Tradition member who's demonstrated magickal skill. Known among Etherites as a capital-S **Scientist**.
- **Initiate:** A brand new and unproven member of a Tradition. Referred to by Etherites as a **Student**.
- **Apprentice:** An aspiring mage who has not yet been accepted into a Tradition.
- **consor:** An especially skilled or powerful unAwakened ally.
- **acolyte:** A loyal and appreciated mortal; also called an **ally** by mages who dislike the religious overtones of the formal rank.

Traditional Names

The following titles don't fit into the official hierarchy but describe a mage's status – or lack of same – within the Traditions. Because most of these terms are archaic, dismissive, or both, lots of mages don't use them at all.

- **The Council, Council of Nine Mystick Traditions:** Used for the nine members who represent each Tradition and a collective name for the faction itself. (The name "Council of Nine" was apparently also adopted by mortal Satanists, which both amused and annoyed real Tradition members.)
- **cabal:** A little Council – that is, a small group of mages who work together.
- ***bani*:** A formal prefix signifying "of the house of..." For example, Painted Horse, *bani* Dreamspeakers.
- **Deacon:** The founding member of a Chantry. Only Choristers and Hermetics employ this title, because its Christian tone makes it especially inappropriate for Traditions like the Verbena and Dreamspeakers.
- **Fellow:** A full-fledged member of a Chantry. This title's rarely used outside formal statements.
- **Sentinel:** An allied mage who works around, and helps protect, a Chantry to which she doesn't officially belong.
- **errant:** A traumatized mage on a vengeance kick. Also used to refer to Tradition mages who quit the Council while nursing a grudge.
- **rogue:** A former member of the Traditions or Technocracy who's turned mercenary.
- **Disparate:** A mage who belongs to a mystic sect that refuses to join the Traditions. Although the term was originally an insult (it means "a lesser and separate part"), many Disparates have reclaimed that name as a defiant honor.
- **Orphan:** Someone who appears to have Awakened on their own, has refused to join an established sect, or both. Often capitalized by Council members, the term's considered rather insulting among both the Traditions and the orphans themselves... especially if the orphan in question is actually a member of a Disparate sect. **(See pp. 214-215.)**

A Tutor's debt must be repaid.

In the Hermetic Tradition, teachers expect regular tuition in exchange for their time and expertise. Other groups handle things differently, but *any* student is expected to pay his or her debts. A pupil or apprentice who doesn't honor those agreements is suspended from the program; if he ditches out without paying for the things he's gained and gets caught doing it, that student has his Avatar Branded. From that point onward, no reputable Tradition mage will teach the former pupil.

A mage's Word is his Honor; break not a sworn Vow.

Yes, wizards lie. Breaking formal oaths, however, is a serious matter. Without a stern Protocol to enforce such agreements,

the Traditions would've fallen apart ages ago. More importantly, an oath is considered an act of magick in itself; to violate one disrespects the Arts. Liars tend to be shunned if and when they get caught. Oathbreakers are often Branded, even in the more permissive new millennium.

The Will of an Oracle must always be obeyed.

Yeah, right. Beyond the fact that few modern mages even believe that Oracles *exist*, this Protocol begs a simple question: *what if that Oracle's an asshole?* The Hermetic records clearly state that Oracular commands must be followed, but that law seems outdated – even dangerous – in the current age. Although Censure is the official punishment for disloyalty, it's been over a century since the last recorded punishment for this sort of disobedience.

Betray not your Cabal or Chantry.

This might be the Council's most unforgiveable sin. A mage who betrays her fellows is Branded, Ostracized, and very often killed.

Conspire not with the enemies of Ascension.

This is perhaps the second most serious offense, although "conspiring" and "enemy" are open to interpretation. Crisis makes for strange bedfellows, especially considering that the Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts owe their membership to such conspiracies. Still, a mage who knowingly puts his companions at risk by dealing with the enemy can be Censured, Branded, and even Ostracized. If the enemy in question is a Nephandus, the penalty could be Gilgul, death, or occasionally both.

Protect the Sleepers; they know not what they do.

As far as many Tradition members are concerned, this is the whole point of their organization. If every wizard has free rein to exploit the Sleepers, the Council's ideals are a sham. Most Council mages protect innocent people; those who don't do so... or who actively endanger them... tend to be shunned, Censured, or possibly worse.

Be subtle in your Arts, lest others know you for what you are.

This Rule of Shade isn't one of the original Protocols; since the Burning Times, though, it's been common sense. Some folks obey this one more than others do, but given the prevalence of monitoring technology, video cameras, cell phones, and the dreaded YouTube post, a flashy wizard's basically writing her own death warrant.

Crimes and Punishments

For centuries, the Council has employed a graduated scale of crimes and punishments. *Low Crimes* involve minor social infractions (cowardice, deceit, laziness, lechery, disrespect, and online Lameness) and acts of petty theft, assault, or damage. *High Crimes* deal with serious offenses against Sleepers, the Council, or both: murder, sexual abuse or violation, betrayal, oathbreaking, Infernalism, and major cases of cruelty, theft, or property destruction.

The first category tends to be enforced by individuals within a cabal, Chantry, or Tradition, usually with compensation (fines and favors), minor mystic *Branding*, *Censure* (a stern official reprimand), social shunning, ordeals, or perhaps a simple but memorable beatdown from one's fellow wizards – see ***Certámen***, below.

High Crimes warrant formal Tribunals, serious legal procedures, and severe punishments like *Indenture* (forced servitude), *Ostracism* (exile), lasting Brands, death, *Gilgul* (the destruction of the Avatar), and – at worst – a combination of those punishments.

Especially in the expanded role of laws within the new millennium, the many levels of Tradition justice reach far beyond the scope of this book. **The Book of Secrets** sourcebook features a more detailed treatment of crimes and punishments under Council law.

Certámen: The Wizards' Duel

To sort out differences between Council mages, there's *certámen*: a formal mystic duel in which disputing mages work out their conflicts through ritualized battle. A custom dating back to medieval Hermetic traditions, certámen provided an honorable method for resolving problems with minimal damage. Sadly, the old, classical form of certámen (described in **Chapter Nine**) was rendered more or less unworkable around the turn of the millennium. Between the loss of Horizon Realms and the disappearance or death of the old Masters, that form of dueling has had to change.

Drawn from the Latin word for "duel," certámen remains an accepted method for resolving the Tradition equivalent of lawsuits. In the mortal realm, however, the old, high-magick style of ritual combat has given way to riddle contests; non-fatal physical sparring matches; occult trivia contests; tests of strength, endurance, or focus; and other competitions that avoid both bodily harm and magickal pyrotechnics. Subtle, mystic contests like lighting a candle or ringing a bell with concentration rather than technology remain popular as well. The old-school wizard duels, though, are just too vulgar for Earthly use.

During the Council's wild years, certámen was as much a sport as a legal procedure. Depending upon your chosen metaplot's events, such vulgar contests might not be possible these days. Regardless of the metaplots, however, new millennium certámen duels tend to be more subtle – and more dangerous – than the vulgar spectacles of old.

Ideally, a certámen match resolves disputes without physical injury, mental illness, or collateral damage. The two disputing parties step into the ritual space after wagering certain stakes or concessions on the outcome. In most cases involving a legal challenge (as opposed to a match done for sport or practice), the losing party issues a formal apology to the victor, pays out reparations, or performs some agreed-upon service for the winning party. In extreme cases, the loser may be exiled from her Chantry, though this happens in only the most severe disputes. As a matter of etiquette, the victor keeps whatever Quintessence she has absorbed in the duel. The loser, of course, loses whatever Quintessence she had staked on the outcome.

For serious disputes, a certámen match might be fought "to the pain" or even – rarely – to the death. In such duels, all parties agree to hold the winner blameless of Assault, Cruelty, or Murder, so long as those crimes are committed only during the duel itself. A cheater, however, could be held accountable for Betrayal, especially if said cheating results in injury or death. Such intense certámen matches are rare, especially in the new millennium. Doissetep used to host deadly duels quite often, but those excesses are now considered yet another symptom of that Chantry's corruption.

Various Traditions have their own forms of certámen, too: prayer or singing contests for the Celestial Chorus, flame wars for the Virtual Adepts, ordeals for shamans and witches, martial arts battles for Akashics and other fighter-types, tests of scholasticism and knowledge for the academic set, and so on. Certain Ecstastics have even been known to have Truth or Dare sessions that *really* test the limits of each participant. Most of these methods lack the spectacle of a serious certámen match; that said, they're also far less likely to attract Paradox, Technocrats, or other kinds of cops.

(For the game systems involved in wizard duels and old-form certámen matches, see the ***Magickal Duels*** section in **Chapter Nine, pp. 430-434.**)

A Vibrant Future?

Despite their name, the Traditions adapt to circumstances. In the wake of the 1990s, the Council has been forced to adapt once again.

The Sphinx

Shortly after Horizon's devastation (again, assuming that it happened to begin with), the Traditions fall into disarray. With most Masters vanished or fled to seclusion, the younger mages find themselves stranded without leadership or direction. Ascension, then, seems like a cruel joke, and the remaining Tradition mages aren't laughing.

And then the transmissions begin.

Enigma takes you where dogma cannot. We do not create the Path to Ascension; we explore it.

In a flurry of communications, this message starts appearing, usually linked to some mysterious clues about secretive matters. Manifesting in various forms – graffiti, tape recordings, letters, emails, billboards, overheard whispers, TV commercials, newscasts, even commercials no one sees except the intended recipient – these transmissions originate around 2002. Most, if not all, of these transmissions feature the image of a sphinx: the hybrid riddle-maker of Greek mythology and Egyptian statuary. Shortly after each transmission is received, the image begins to disappear. As for the messages themselves, they arrive clean, untraceable by any method of technology or magick. Each transmission seems to be tailored to its original recipient, peppered with riddles, hints, and the apparently universal message about enigma, dogma, and the exploration

Future Fates: The Sphinx

As portrayed in the sourcebook **Transmissions from the Rogue Council**, the Sphinx and its origins are intentional mysteries, meant to remain unsolved. In that spirit, **Mage 20** does not provide an official solution to the riddle. Thus, a **Mage** Storyteller has the following options:

- **The Sphinx abides:** It's still out there, still sending transmissions, and still unknown. Your players might receive transmissions from the entity called the Sphinx, but its ultimate nature – through obviously helpful – remains mysterious. As before, it is whatever you want it to be.
- **The Sphinx has been revealed:** The party or parties behind the transmissions has been discovered or has revealed itself. Maybe it was the old Council, an Umbral entity, or whatever else you want it to have been. Or perhaps the transmissions simply stopped, and this riddle of the Sphinx remains unsolved. Either way, the Sphinx and its messages are past history by 2014, though they might have laid the groundwork for the renewed Council of Nine Traditions.
- ***What* Sphinx?** Whether because Horizon never fell or because the transmissions never appeared, the Sphinx metaplot never occurred. Maybe it'll show up in later adventures or remain a rumor in certain corners of the Awakened world. The game-changing elements of the transmissions and their source, however, have no effect upon your chronicle.

Mage 20's New Horizon Council assumes the first or second options. Although the Sphinx itself might remain mysterious, its influence has nurtured the formation of a new Council to replace the old, theoretically retaining its strengths and avoiding the previous flaws. In option #3, of course, the Rogue Council never formed, so the Traditions could maintain their old Horizon-led form, remain divided and besieged, or have transitioned to a newer state thanks to other guiding circumstances. Either way, the Traditions, in some form or other, endure.

of Ascension. Thanks to the sphinx design, the sender of these transmissions is quickly dubbed *the Sphinx*.

Who *is*, or *was*, the Sphinx? More than a decade after the transmissions first appeared, no one really knows.

Because those transmissions favor the Nine Traditions, recipients assume that the Sphinx is a Tradition Archmaster, a collection of Masters, one or more Oracles, the lost Horizon Council, or some entity sympathetic to the Traditions as a whole. Not all of the recipients, though, are Tradition mages. Certain transmissions are sent to Technocrats, orphans, or Disparates, and a few manifest to Sleepers. All of them contain a certain degree of helpful information, but they suggest courses of action that often seem dangerous, radical, destructive, or even suicidal.

The Rogue Council and Panopticon

The faceless nature of the Sphinx and its concealed motivations, lead certain mages to distrust its influence. Other mages, cheered by its hopeful attitude, embrace the Sphinx with near-fanatical devotion. The majority of Tradition mages take a skeptically optimistic approach, following the Sphinx's guidance but watching for traps and hidden agendas. The phrase *Rogue Council* starts to make the rounds, possibly inspired by the idea that a cabal of the old Masters or a new group is taking charge of the Traditions again.

Given the old Council's excesses and stagnation, certain parties are less than thrilled with the idea of some shadowy council returning to the old ways. A Technocratic group called *Panopticon* forms in an effort to track down and stamp out the Sphinx and its devotees. Within the Traditions, three groups come together to support the Rogue Council, oppose it, or continue a wait-and-see attitude until more data appears:

- **The Emissaries** craft a *Rogue Council Manifesto* that affirms the old Council's ideals while embracing new levels of freedom, greater diversity, and an acceptance of technology as a valid tool in Ascension's quest. Picking up the militant elements of the Ascension War, these Emissaries follow the Sphinx's directions and begin attacking Technocracy strongholds, undermining Nephandi schemes, and uniting Tradition cabals under the banner of the New Horizon Council. Roughly a decade after the Manifesto's publication, the new Council is up and running, its agendas guided by, but not dependent upon, the Sphinx and its transmissions.
- **The Guardians** remain skeptical about, or downright hostile toward, the Sphinx and its covert agenda. Protecting what little they have left and dedicated to their individual priorities, these mages take a wary view of the Emissaries and their *Manifesto*. Some have lost friends to the Sphinx's machinations, and others see an ominous mystery behind the entire ruse. These willworkers refuse to join the New Horizon Council, either out of loyalty to the "true Horizon" or from sheer suspicion about the Rogue Council's aims.
- **The Fencers** mediate between both extremes, keeping an eye out for traps while accepting the helpful nature of the Sphinx. These mages might join the New Horizon group, but they remain cautious about the ultimate source of its inspiration.
- Meanwhile, **Panopticon** continues to chase the Sphinx and its devotees, without firm or conclusive victories. Using old-school Ascension War tactics, this group devotes itself to wiping such residual Reality Deviance off the books, clearing the way for a new and more efficient future. (For details, see the ***Technocratic Union*** section, later in this chapter.)

Is the Sphinx a holdover from the Ascension War? Could it be leading the way toward a fresh approach to Ascension, without the clutter of past ages? Is the whole thing a trap for the Traditions, or has the lost Horizon Council found a way to defy entropy in its quest to create a vibrant new age for Ascension?

As its name suggests, the Sphinx affair is a riddle whose ultimate solution has yet to be revealed...

The New Horizon Council?

Those original Traditions were a Eurocentric conglomeration of forced identities and awkward compromises. Following the collapse of the old Council's stronghold in Horizon (assuming that the collapse occurred), the Traditions scattered, regrouped, and staged a "New Horizon Convocation" in Los Angeles toward the end of 2001 as a trap to catch and butcher their opponents. (See the **Revised**-edition **Book of Madness**, **Mage Storyteller's Handbook**, and **Ascension**). In the aftermath, the revitalized Traditions elected new leaders and began establishing new Protocols and a fresh start.

As the Council strides into the second decade of the new millennium, its Traditions follow the dynamic spirit of the times, perhaps forging a *New Horizon Council* that reflects the current era. Certain changes have already taken hold, and others shift in accord with work and circumstance.

Ultimately, this New Horizon Council is an *optional* metaplot development. Certain changes have already been incorporated into **Mage 20**'s treatment of the Traditions, and others are still pending. If you choose to stick with a "classic-style" **Mage** chronicle, you can either ignore the New Horizon elements or use, change, or discard them as you see fit. If, however, you want to bring **Mage** into the new millennium, the following changes reflect the Council's adjustments in this dynamic and unpredictable age.

- **The Akashayana:** Renouncing the innate chauvinism of its westernized name, the Akashic Brotherhood formally adopts its insider name as the default form of address. All references to "brothers" are purged in favor of the name *Akashayana*, which also acknowledges the group's pan-Asian elements over its previous China-centric veneer.

- **The Celestial Chorus:** In the new millennium, the Chorus focuses on righteous deeds rather than religious adherence. Shaking free of corrupt religious institutions, Choristers embrace the more nomadic role of kind pilgrims in the mode of Jesus and his followers. Despite this Christian influence, however, the Chorus embraces monotheists from every spiritual path... up to and including certain Divinity-is-One neopagans.

- **The Chakravanti:** Striking the entire notion of death from their name, this revitalized Tradition returns to its Sanskrit roots. Once again, the Tradition defines itself by the Great Cycle, or Wheel – not by mortality but by renewal. In place of their previous morbidity, many Chakravanti favor bright colors that combine Indian dye-work and Mexican *Dia de los Muertos* decorations, balancing the recognition of death with the vitality of life.

- **The Kha'vadi:** Abandoning its "slave name," the Dreamspeaker Tradition assumes its longtime "spirit title" as the group's official honorific. No longer "dreamers" but "speakers," the Kha'vadi position themselves as the collective voice of oppressed cultures and forgotten spirits, bringing new visions to a contaminated world.

- **The Order of Hermes:** Trusting the stability of their venerable Arts, the Hermetics retain that Tradition's emphasis on discipline, merit, and excellence. Even so, the new Masters avoid the stifling hubris of the previous generation, preferring Hermes the Wise Trickster over Hermes the Revered Master.

- **The Mercurial Elite:** The outdated concept of being "virtual" makes way for the changeable technomysticism of the Mercurials. Adopting a play on words that reflects capriciousness, mutability, and the recognition of Mercury/ Hermes as the God of All-Space, the Elite shuck old-school cyberpunk in favor of being everywhere at once and yet nowhere for long.

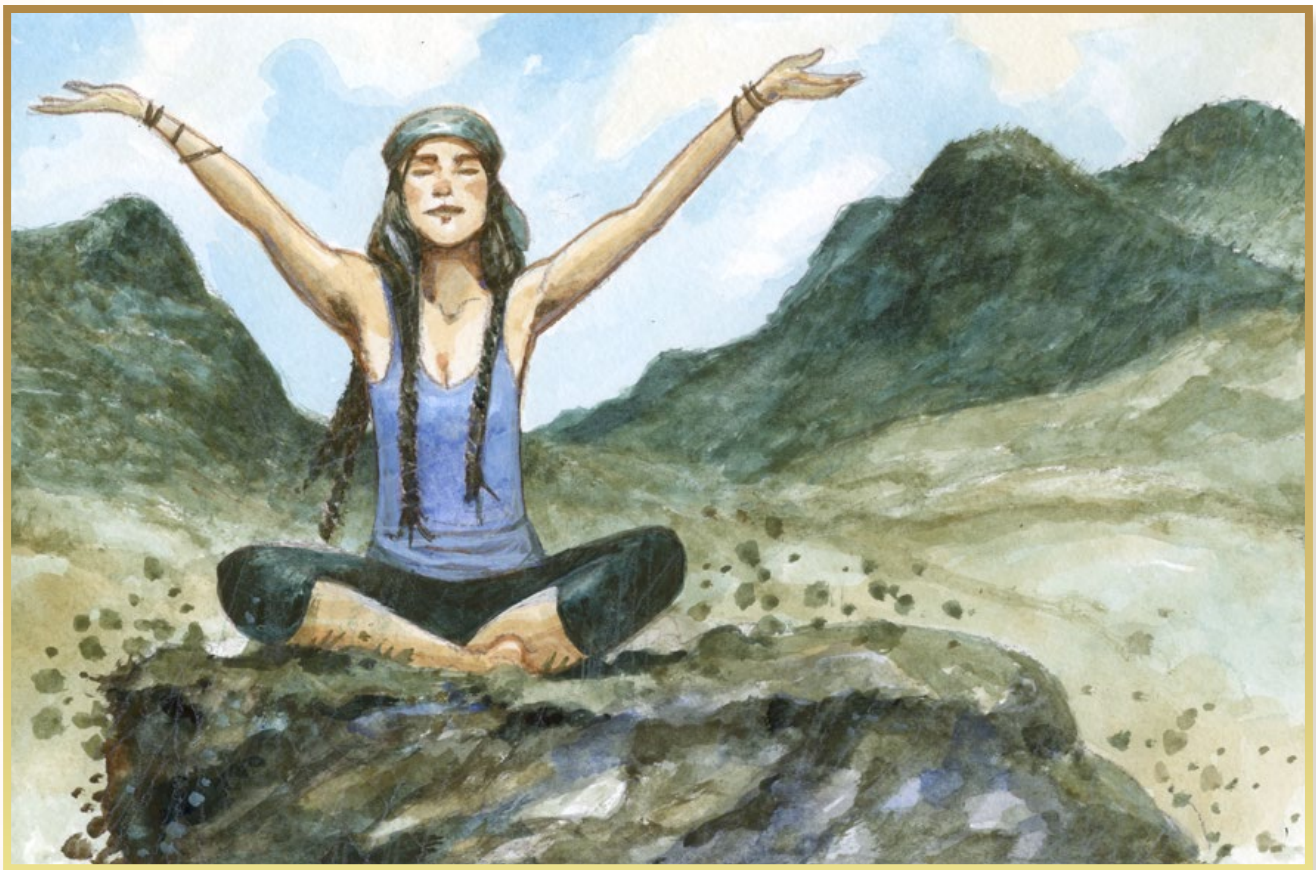
- **The Sahajiya:** Realizing that a "Cult of Ecstasy" is not being taken seriously, the Ecstatic Tradition reverts to its older name, whose meaning – "the Naturals" – reflects the group's embrace of human passions, natural cycles, postmodern neotribalism, and rejection of the Technocratic civilization process.

- **The Society of Ether:** It finally happens! With many of its old Masters dead, the Etherian Tradition dumps its sexist name to pursue a romantic futurism for everyone.

- **The Verbenae:** The witch-folk remain perhaps the most militant Tradition, combining their romantic primitivism with urbanized technopaganism. Revitalized by the popularity of fantasy and neotribal subcultures, the group tightens its alliance with the Kha'vadi and Sahajiya, crafting a global network of activist "tribes" that undermines the Technocratic hold.

The Colony

This New Horizon Council has been shaping a stronghold in the Southern Alps of New Zealand's wilderness – close enough to civilization to be accessible to mages from around



the world, yet remote enough to stay under the Technocratic radar. Disguised as a movie studio called *Colony Filmworks*, this "new Horizon" is gradually being shaped from a combination of natural materials, high-tech capabilities, and Quintessence drawn from a series of natural Nodes that have remained largely untapped. Even so, the Colony (as it's often known) is still a work in progress, its materials and support carefully filtered in so as not to catch the Technocratic gaze.

Connected to other Chantries across the world, the Colony has portals to several Earthly and Otherworldly locations, as well as a backdoor into the Digital Web. This effort, however, is far less grand than either Horizon or Doissetep. The New Horizon Council has learned its lesson. If and when the Traditions regain their old power, this council intends that said power will be used more wisely than it had been before.

Nine seats have been set aside for new Primi representatives when the time is right. As of 2014, however, those seats remain unfilled. The elections that decide the Council's fresh leadership have yet to be decided. Who stands to represent the New Horizon Council, then?

As with so many elements of **Mage 20**, that decision rests with you...

Tradition Descriptions

The following two-page spreads present the Traditions in an easy to follow format. The sections dealing with the Technocracy and Disparates feature the same type of organization, with a few obvious differences.

- **Overview:** An overall impression of the group, its history, and the sort of person who's drawn to this sect.
- **Organization:** A brief look at the sect's overall organization.
- **Initiation:** A glance at the hoops a new member must jump through in order to join the sect.
- **Affinity Spheres:** The Sphere most often associated with the group's training and specialization. In the Council's old days, each Tradition held a seat based on that Sphere; given recent, intervening events, however, this may not be true anymore. Training in the 21st century is more eclectic and personalized than it used to be, so the secondary Spheres are also available as Affinity Spheres. In any case, a new character gets only *one* of these Spheres as his Affinity Sphere. (For further details about character creation, see **Chapter Six**.)
- **Focus:** The group's overall approach to magickal beliefs, practices, and tools. *These paradigms and practices, however, are NOT exclusive.* Many mages within a group pursue a mixture of different beliefs, practices, and tools that suit each individual's beliefs. For details, see ***Focus and the Arts***, **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 565-600).
- **Stereotypes:** Every group assumes it holds the keys to the One True Way. This entry shows what a typical member of the group might say about other Awakened sects. Assume that all factions share a reflexive hatred and fear of the Fallen and the Mad. That doesn't mean that every mage within a given group will flee or attack Nephandi or Marauders on sight, though; some individuals might find those mages quite attractive, or at the very least sympathetic. The official word on both groups, however, is simple: *stay away when possible, and kill whenever necessary.*

Akashic Brotherhood

Our bodies strive to recall the harmony our souls knew before we were born.

Harmony is found in the flow of What Is. To attune one's self to that flow is so simple that it can take lifetimes to master. It is, perhaps, the lot of man to strive *against* that flow; certainly, the modern world is filled with distractions from such purposes. And so, the *Akashayana*, commonly known as the Akashic Brotherhood, seek harmony in a world filled with chaos.

Deeply misunderstood among the Council as "peaceful warriors," devotees of the *Akashayana Sangha* ("Order of the Vehicle of Akasha") strengthen their bodies to cultivate their minds – and, by extension, the Sphere of Mind – in their pursuit of harmony. And yet, harmony often demands conflict. Just as the strings of an instrument must be struck before they can vibrate harmoniously, so too has the Brotherhood endured millennia of war. In the process, the Akashayana refined *Do* ("the Way," pronounced *doe*), the primal martial art from which all others descend.

Do, however, is more than mere war techniques. Encompassing a range of spiritual practices from tea ceremonies to Tantric union, Do focuses a person's essence, form, and intentions. Through relentless training, the student (or *Akashi*) develops the concentration he needs in order to discern the essential dissatisfaction of *Samsara*, the perpetual cycle or flow of existence. A Harmonious Brother (an honorific used regardless of the mage's gender) strives to help all beings realize *samadhi* (enlightenment, Ascension) and liberate each *Bodhicitta* (Avatar) from the cycle of rebirth.

Despite some misperceptions, the Akashayana did not originate in China. In a Time Before Time, humanity's world was a single Mount Meru; there, the Meru'ai people lived in harmony. It's been said that the Celestines Dragon, Tiger, and Phoenix taught the Meru'ai the disciplines that would become Do. Eventually, however, the imperfections of this world sundered Mount Meru from its celestial foundations, scattering the Meru'ai throughout the mountainous region later called Tibet. From there, they supposedly brought their language and ways to India, Nepal, China, and points east. Those origins have followed them wherever they go.

Over the millennia, countless teachers – notably Gautama Buddha, "the Awakened One" – have incorporated elements of Do into Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, hatha yoga, and folk medicine. Akashi helped build Shaolin Temple and Angkor Wat; they overthrew tyrants, and their monasteries reached across Asia from Nepal to the Ryukyu Islands. In modern times, echoes of their teachings have spread worldwide.

Today, any mindful Brother can relive this entire history to better understand the cycle of continual remanifestation. The *shunyata* (primal emptiness) that underlies all things holds karmic traces of all past thoughts and actions. This imprint has several names –*Merumandala*, *Akashakarma*, the *Universal Consciousness*, *shared memory*, and more; modern Brothers, though, call it the *Akashic Record*. A quiet mind, freed of ego, can sense the Record, in which all consciousness joins in a single stream. Once immersed in Akashic mindspace, a seeker's awareness helps him parse the collective memories of Akashayana throughout history.

That history includes awful times: the Himalayan Wars against the early Chakravanti; conquests and revolutions; the sect's murderous rivalries with the Wu Lung, Dalou-laoshi, and rival Akashic groups; the Boxer Rebellion and its opium-trade beginnings; Mongol invasions and Kamikaze Wars; the Screaming Ghost Purge and Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward. Akashics have trained samurai and disemboweled themselves for honor; they've raised katars with the Rajput, stormed the Forbidden City, starved in Pol Pot's Killing Fields, and turned to ash at Hiroshima. The outer calm of an Akashic masks deep pains and passions from every age and every conflict, and the dreadful karma from those times lingers even now.

Several constants link all Akashi, regardless of culture: *discipline*, which the study of Do demands; *empathy*, nurtured

by connection with the Akashic Record; *fitness*, honed by the pursuit of Do; *respect*, sharpened by intense apprenticeships; and *focus*, without which one cannot attain even the most limited understanding of Do. Across the globe, they share the same terminology even when divided into different groups. The popularity of martial arts culture has brought many initiates to the Akashic Path; sadly, the modern world's various distractions make this a difficult Path for all but the most dedicated aspirants.

Today, the Akashayana face a bizarre challenge: their ancient enemies, the Wu Lung, seem to have chosen the Akashic way. Although the Brotherhood remains wary about this alliance, the Tradition's compassionate ethic encourages the Akashayana to give their old rivals a chance. To cope with that decision, though, some folks say today's Akashics will need what their Tradition has seldom prized and rarely cultivated: imagination.

Organization: The Brotherhood is essentially led by the **Kannagara**, monastic ascetics of the Phoenix Robe sect. Today, however, lots of power resides with the **Shi-Ren** ("Benevolent Aristocracy"), a faction of politically active traditionalists who want to expand Akashic influence in world affairs. Tradition mages in the West most often encounter warriors of the **Vajrapani** (derisively called "Warring Fists") and the eclectic iconoclasts of the **Li-Hai**, who seek enlightenment through heroic experience.

Initiation: At temples, ashrams, and dojos across the world, *Sifus* (Masters) and *Sihings* (Adepts) accept disciples who display open minds and serious purpose. Each teacher typically teaches only one pupil at a time. Akashic doctrine maintains that every person must find his or her way to enlightenment; as a result, Akashayana receive very little guidance or encouragement. Many frustrated pupils give up on this Path; those who persist, however, cultivate impeccable fitness of mind, heart, and body.

Affinity Spheres: Mind or Life

Focus: "Magick" is actually self-perfection and cosmic harmony. To master such Arts in the proper Way (Do), a person must expand awareness in all things, clarify thoughts, focus the body, and subdue emotional confusion. Asian alchemy, craftwork, faith, yoga, social dominion, and martial arts training allow a Brother to channel life energy (*chi*) toward astounding feats of physical, mental, and energetic achievement. As a result, common paradigms include *Bring Back the Golden Age*, *Everything's an Illusion*, *It's All Good*, and occasionally *Might is Right*.

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: The engaging illusions they construct distract them from the transcendence they strive to achieve.

The Technocracy: Metal dragons in a stifling box.

The Disparates: Lost children and broken relations... yet there's more to them than there might seem.

Celestial Chorus

DISSONANCE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF HARMONY, MERELY A HARMONY THAT NEEDS TO BE ADJUSTED UNTIL THE SONG RINGS TRUE.

Heretics and idealists from the world's monotheistic creeds, the embattled Celestial Chorus heeds the voice of the Divine. All living beings, conjured and animated by the One – by whatever name that One is known – can join that Song and shape Creation. Defying their varied orthodoxies, Choristers teach that the Song has many harmonies. A person of faith can hear it and approach the One through different creeds. And for their tolerance, the Singers have endured a bloodied history of martyrdom.

Chorister liturgies tell of unity and division, triumph and heartbreak. The oldest plainsongs recount the First Age, the Shattering, when the One's pure unity was broken, and the First Singers, mortal heroes of boundless faith, who confronted and subdued the broken spirits of flawed entities. Pentatonic chants resurrected from Egypt's 18th Dynasty recall the blind priest Mentu-hetep, who brought Pharaoh Amenhotep IV to the worship of the Sun god, Aton. The Pharaoh's city, Akhetaten; his new name, *Ikhnaton*; his fellow worshippers, the Sacred Congregation, of disparate lands yet living in harmony – of all these things and more the Chorus sings. Then their chant becomes a dirge: jealous priests of the old faith destroyed Ikhnaton's city and tried to wipe him from history. The Congregation dispersed across the Middle East.

And then, a rising melody, its counterpoint low and dark: For 16 centuries, diverse and fractious groups of Congregants grew in strength. First came Mithraic mystery cultists, guarded by Roman shields; later, after the Christ's Ascension, a sect called the Messianic Voices. To suppress corruption in the nascent Roman Church, Messianic mage Claudius Dediticius founded his Knights of Archangel Gabriel, Messenger of God. He could not have imagined that the Gabrielites would eventually become the Cabal of Pure Thought, forerunners of the Technocracy's New World Order.

Discordant notes herald the War Song: through simony and indulgences, king-making and cruelty, the Cabal amassed temporal power. Its rigid ways and rampant abuses, such as the barbarous Albigensian Crusade, drove away "heretical" magi. During the Western Schism, these *Antinomians* fostered new movements: *Waldensians*, *Hussites*, and the *Heresy of the Free Spirit*. They reached out to like-minded spirits in Isma'ili Islam and the Bektashi Order; to the Majestic Kings of the Zoroastrians; even to the Hindu nationalist scholar-warriors, the *Vishnudharadhara* ("Vishnu's Sword"). Such ecumenism was heretical, but Antinomians knelt to no Earthly authority, whether Church or State. And for this, they were hunted. The flames of the Inquisition burned hot. Meanwhile, in wars of words among themselves and of magick against Hermetics and the witch-folk, the Congregants faltered... if never in devotion, then certainly in progress.

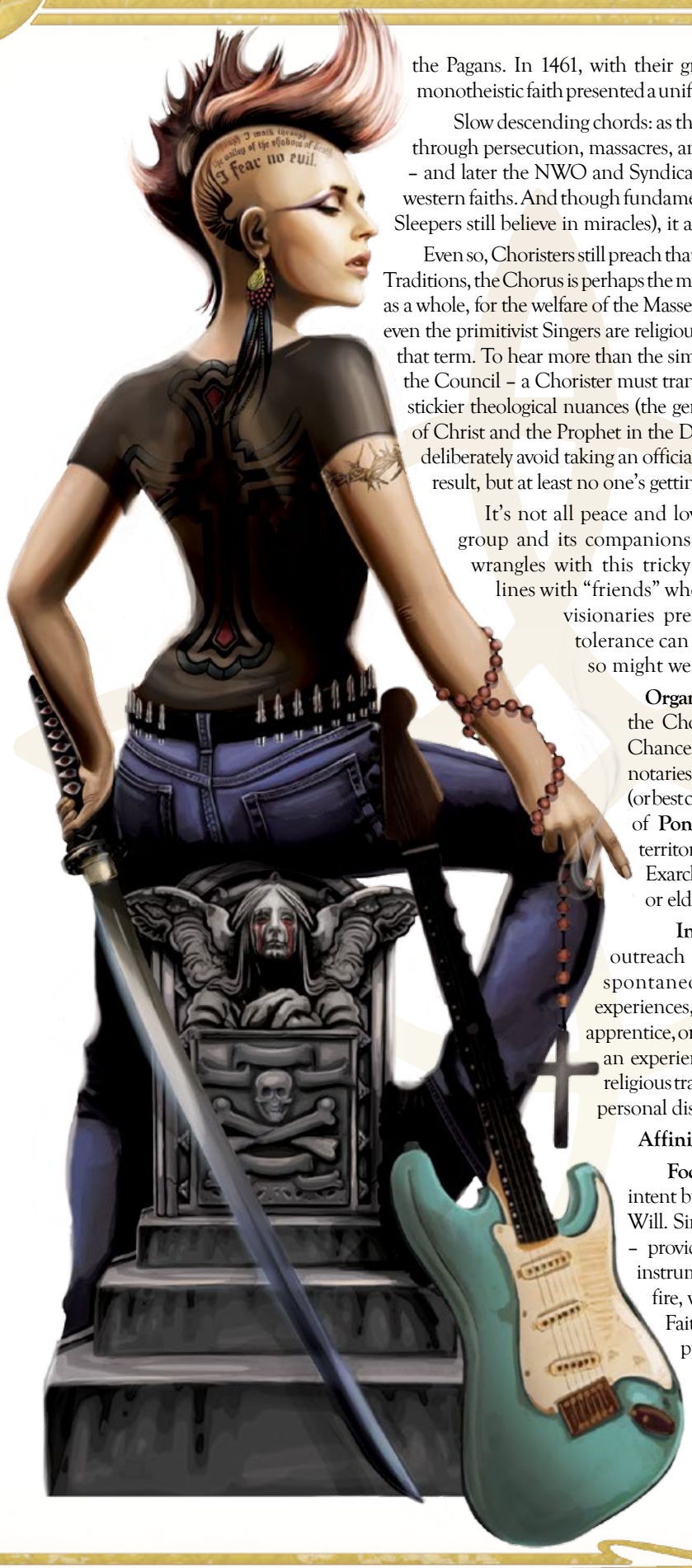
A new harmony: Valoran, a French bishop hiding from the Inquisition, reunited the Messianic Voices and made peace with

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: *"My Father's home hath many chambers."* Though I might not understand them all... might even, God forgive me, hate a few... I choose to remember that we all receive Divinely guided grace.

The Technocracy: Traitors to Grace who imprison the world with mechanical cacophony.

The Disparates: Lost souls, one and all.



the Pagans. In 1461, with their gravest breaches healed, Congregants from every monotheistic faith presented a unified face to the Council of Nine as the *Chœur Céleste*.

Slow descending chords: as the Order of Reason rose, the new Chorus declined through persecution, massacres, and intolerance. To divide and conquer, the Cabal – and later the NWO and Syndicate – fostered centuries of culture war among the western faiths. And though fundamentalism strengthens the Chorus' paradigm (many Sleepers still believe in miracles), it also destroys the message of divine unity.

Even so, Choristers still preach that message. More to the point, they *live* it. Among the Traditions, the Chorus is perhaps the most compassionate… and it certainly speaks loudest, as a whole, for the welfare of the Masses. Although certain members can be fanatical, not even the primitivist Singers are religious fundamentalists in the way Sleepers understand that term. To hear more than the simplest notes of the Song – and then survive within the Council – a Chorister must transcend dogma and embrace faith. With regards to stickier theological nuances (the gender of Divinity, the limits of tolerance, the roles of Christ and the Prophet in the Divine plan, that sort of thing), modern Choristers deliberately avoid taking an official stance. There's plenty of tension in the ranks as a result, but at least no one's getting burned alive over it anymore!

It's not all peace and love, of course. Old wounds linger between this group and its companions. Out of necessity and faith, the Chorus still wrangles with this tricky alliance, debating where and when to draw lines with "friends" who practice loathsome Arts. Still, the Tradition's visionaries present the Council with proof of what united tolerance can bring. "We Sing in harmony," they insist, "and so might we all."

Organization: Hierarchical since the Roman Republic, the Chorus is led by its **Curia**, a 17-member synod of Chancellors and associated finance officers, tribunes, notaries, and liturgical commissioners. The most respected (or best connected) Chancellor holds the ceremonial position of **Pontifex Maximus**. Each Chancellor commands a territorial staff of **Exarchs**, sometimes called bishops. Exarchs supervise local leaders called **Presbyters** (priests or elders), who present this Tradition's human face.

Initiation: Presbyters seek recruits through social outreach in church organizations. Some worshippers spontaneously Awaken through powerful religious experiences, particularly those involving music. Each new apprentice, or *Catechumen*, undertakes rigorous instruction from an experienced mage called a *Præcept*. Like many forms of religious training, this instruction involves matters of doctrine, personal discipline, and – obviously – lots of singing lessons.

Affinity Spheres: Prime; Forces or Spirit.

Focus: The Arts flow not from personal achievement or intent but from faith, unity, and harmony with the Divine Will. Singing – especially many voices joined in harmony – provides this Tradition's oldest and most important instrument. Chorister magick tends to manifest in light, fire, warmth, harmonic vibrations, and sublime music. Faith and High Ritual form the core of Celestial Chorus practices, so the group's paradigms include *Creation is Divine and Alive*, *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, and, of course, *It's All Good – Have Faith*.

Cult of Ecstasy

Life's a gift, but most poor bastards never get past the wrapping paper.

Consciousness is both a playground and a trap. Infinite in possiblity yet limited by necessity, the human mind is the seat of everything real... at least as far as human beings are concerned, anyway. And so, the Ecstatic Tradition expands reality by expanding consciousness. If you rearrange perceptions, they believe, you also rearrange potential.

To members of this "cult," magick flows from altered consciousness. A mind unfettered is a mind released from limitations and thus capable of anything. Because consciousness *depends* upon limitations in order to function, though, a mage must be able to slide in and out of an open state. Thus, Ecstatics have crazy eyes and eccentric manners that seem compelling yet frightening.

Despite their image as snuggly hippie-kids, Ecstatics can be the scariest mages around. For starters, they're intense and unpredictable. Many are not, as the saying goes, good with boundaries, and they tend to say and do inappropriate things, like kissing enemies and laughing at pain. They're reckless by normal standards and often pull stunts that unAwakened folks could not survive. Passion is a sacrament they indulge to exciting and often uncomfortable extremes. "Extreme," in fact, is a good way to sum these mages up. They are, by definition, *ex*: outside, beyond, no longer a part of what has come before or after.

Often linked with the 1960s – perhaps the high point of this group's influence – ecstasy is among the oldest Paths on Earth. Primal humans, according to Cult lore, ate psychedelic mushrooms and thus opened the conflux between spirit, animal, and *homo sapiens*. Even now, Ecstatics see themselves as living gateways between flesh, spirit, and imagination, bound to all three and transcending each; in honor of their ancestors, many employ *entheogens* – drugs that "open the god within" – not as vices but as tools of sacred illumination.

Since those origins, Ecstatic mages have lived beyond the bounds of respectability, devotees of a left-hand path that embraces sex, drugs, music, dance, pain, pleasure, risk, and even death in the name of divine madness. Seers and shamans, rake-hells and prophets, these mages run with Sleepers who aren't afraid to go beyond. And yet, largely thanks to their reliance on extremity, Council Ecstatics have powerful ethics. The *Code of Ananda* – the Cult's commandments – forbids these mages from forcing their Path on unwilling partners. "Passions," the Code declares, "are the seat of the Self, and if they bleed, so too does the Soul."

More than their esoteric peers, Ecstatics enjoy the company of unAwakened folks. Challenging Sleepers to shake off that sleep, these mages favor art, music, and bohemian and neotribal subcultures – environments where they can reward courage and inspire creativity. For a while, especially during its psychedelic heyday, this Tradition wore its "cult" moniker with pride. Recently, though, many Ecstatics have begun to feel limited by that flippant

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: A bunch of tight-assed academics who're often scared to push beyond the obvious limits of their disciplines and embrace everything they *could* be on the other side of those expectations.

The Technocracy: Abominations of the human condition, and the source of almost everything wrong today.

The Disparates: I don't blame them for wanting their freedom. Too bad it's cost them almost everything else...

name. Cults have deluded, sinister implications in the popular imagination, so the group starts to favor its old title, *Sahajiya* (sa-HA-gee-AH, or "the Naturals"), as the new millennium dawns.

Organization: Informal and nomadic, this Tradition's loose structure reflects its focus on individual transcendence. It has several subsects but few leaders as such. Cultists tend to congregate at festivals, raves, concerts, and other tribal gatherings, mingling with "sleepwalkers" who tread the line between Sleeper culture and full Awakening. For the most part, this group favors *influence* over *organization*. Each Ecstatic is encouraged to follow his or her own Path, so long as that Path doesn't violate the sacred nature of other people. The only rigid element in the Sahajiya Path is the *Code of Ananda* and its emphasis on compassionate respect. Everything else is negotiable.

Initiation: *Five Steps to Ecstasy*: 1: Surrender your fear; 2: Focus your intentions; 3. Open yourself; 4. Attune yourself; 5: Repeat Step 1. To help a new Ecstatic into Step 1, a mentor challenges that person to leap beyond his fears and then use his intentions to fly instead of fall. *Diksham* – the mentor/ student covenant – provides a safe space for the initiate to learn magick and control. Often, mentors and students become lovers, opening a channel of intimacy and trust that goes beyond mere sex. That's not a rule, though, and compulsion is considered the worst sin an Ecstatic can commit.

After initiation and initial training, a mentor often pulls away from her student, trusting him to find his own way. She'll provide advice or secondary helpers, but she refuses to become a crutch. In order to grow along this Path, a mage must shape his own triumphs and mistakes.

Affinity Spheres: Time; Life or Mind.

Focus: "Get out of your own way" sums up the Ecstatic paradigm. To touch the *Lakashim* ("Divine Pulse"), a person must blow open the doors of inhibition and fear. Magick is the communion between a focused mind and the Lakashim – a dance of possibilities directed by crazy wisdom. To perform it, an Ecstatic guides *Ojas* (life force) energy with conscious but flexible intentions. Ideally, a mage operates in a flux state in which neither time nor inhibitions block the life force – aware of what she's doing and yet open enough to do *anything*.

The Cult's infamous substances and stimulations are meant to blow open mental doors and blast away obstacles to Enlightenment. That's the theory, anyway. In reality, those same tools can become obstacles in their own right. Smart Ecstatics, then, keep shifting their tools around to avoid stagnation and dependence on "the same old shit." Crazy wisdom is the core of this group's many practices, which include everything from gutter magick, yoga, and martial arts to cybernetic hypertech. And so, paradigms include *Creation's Divine and Alive*, *Everything is Chaos*, *It's All Good*, and quite often *Everything's an Illusion*.

Dreamspeakers

I'm speaking to the end of silence. Can you hear the thunder yet?

Earth has a voice. Not many folks can still hear it. Long ago, all people listened to that voice – the beat of Life and the song of Spirit. Pride, however, has driven wedges between our world and the spirit realm. It takes strength and vision to hold on to that primal connection in spite of all the distractions of modern life... even more so when that modern world has tried everything in its power to break you. And yet, this Tradition and its people refuse to be broken.

Endurance is perhaps the best word to summarize the Society of Dreams. Its vision has endured. Its people have endured. The Tradition itself has endured ignorance, slavery, division, oppression, betrayal, marginalization, stereotyping, and a simplistic view from outsiders that has likewise endured long past all reasonable expectations. Aside from the group's staunch allies in the Verbena and Ecstatic Traditions (and often including them as well), the Council's view of the Dreamers has remained paternalistic and patronizing for over 500 years. And yet, they endure.

It's appropriate that this Tradition had not *one* founder but *two*. Naioba and Star-of-Eagles both heard the call of their spirits in very different lands, yet they transcended their differences to fall in love with one another. The sacred marriage between these female and male devotees inspired a diverse confederation of African, Native American, and Asian visionaries, for while that marriage was a ritual, the love involved was real. Although their romance ended with Naioba's assassination by a Vision-Mocker, that love, with its many symbolic ties, still holds the group together.

With few exceptions, the *Kha'vadi* ("those whose vision shapes the world") come from indigenous cultures or their technological descendants. Some embrace modern fashions and technologies, whereas others favor their ancestral ways. Though the Tradition holds a handful of European, Oceanic, and Asiatic spirit-workers, the vast majority of the group hails from Africa or the Americas. Often referred to by the Siberian word *shaman*, they're more properly thought of as *medicine-people*: folks who use natural healing gifts rather than selfish magick. Instead of bending reality to their will, the Kha'vadi work *with* reality... not the twisted reality of the Technocratic world but the deeper reality of the World Spirit in its many forms.

Thanks in part to its healer nature, this Tradition gets stereotyped as a bunch of bongo-beating throwbacks. That impression is absurd. Kha'vadi are spirit warriors fighting to save a sick world from itself. Especially in recent years, the Dreamers have become more militant than they've been for centuries. Groups like the **Red Spear** and the **Ghost Wheel Society** defy the Tradition's "stoic savage" image, with a newer faction, the **Akinkanju** ("Unbroken") even lobbying to toss out the Council's "slave-name" and replace it with a self-determined title. This age, after all, is a "White-mare," and the 'Speakers have had enough of it. Some wounds need to be cleansed with fire.

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: Despite all their admirable qualities, I trust the ones I must, consider a rare few of them my friends, and keep eyes in the back of my head open for the next inevitable failure.

The Technocracy: The living essence of the White-mare.

The Disparates: I sense a trick here, and I think I like it...

These days, a new vista offers fresh hope: the Internet – a global connection network with its own spiritual aspect. Computer-minded Kha'vadi realize that the Digital Web has a consciousness... and by extension, a soul. The practical tools of social media allow Dreamspeakers from across the world to meet up and reconstruct their roots, and the spiritual side of the Digital Web nurtures a growing technoshamanic movement whose possibilities and repercussions reach further than *anyone*, even the 'Speakers themselves, can imagine...

Organization: Although the shamanic Path tends to be solitary, medicine-people can be quite social. And so, this Tradition combines a respect for autonomy with the supportive network of a tribe. For centuries, many Dreamspeakers preferred to wander their own roads; in recent years, however, the group has returned to the community-centered focus of many pre-imperial cultures. Separation, after all, has been a liability. With stronger bonds between them, the 'Speakers share a greater voice.

In previous ages, Dreamspeakers met in distant corners of the spirit world – even forming Realms where the Old Ways remained untouched. Recently, however, the Unbroken Folk have turned their focus to the material world, meeting in both rural and urban settings, often gathering at powwows, hip-hop shows, block parties, and neotribal festivals. Social media groups, too, provide meeting grounds for the new breed of Dreamspeakers. In all cases, the previous solitude has shifted toward a more social focus.

Even so, Kha'vadi remain distinctly informal. Elders are respected by their younger peers, but youthful vigor feeds the future and earns its own sort of respect. The long-winded titles favored by "the White Council" sound stupid to the average 'Speaker. Deeds and wisdom speak louder than laws.

Initiation: Like his Tradition, a Dreamspeaker survives apparent death. Part of his initiation involves ritual (sometimes literal) demise; that passing brings the shaman into the spirit realm, where he faces trials and challenges. Assuming he survives that ordeal, the *kaimi* ("initiate") becomes a *so-cha* ("disciple") and returns to the mortal world with fresh insight and greater vision.

Affinity Spheres: Spirit; Force, Life, or Matter.

Focus: *Medicine*, not magick, is the essence of Dreamspeaker Arts. An avatar is *Howahkan*: the mysterious voice that speaks to those who are ready to hear it. Sorcery is an egotistical and ultimately destructive Path that leads people away from the Good Road of harmony with the World Spirit. To reach past the illusions of mortal life, one must listen to Creation's heartbeat, face death, and remain open to the voice through which all life speaks.

Practice-wise, 'Speakers favor medicine-work, craftwork, shamanism, crazy wisdom, and faith. A few pursue cybernetics, yoga, Voudoun, and witchcraft, but their companions often shun them. Common paradigms include *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Creation's Divine and Alive*, *Bring Back the Golden Age*, and sometimes *Might is Right*.

EUTHANATOS

DEATH ISN'T JUST A WORD TO ME – IT'S GENESIS.

Death is not an end but simply part of a larger cycle. Life picks up where death leaves off, and death finishes what life begins, bringing it back around for another go at things. Sometimes, a life becomes toxic to everything nearby. At that point, death becomes a blessing... a blessing the Euthanatos Tradition is ready to bestow.

The Euthanatos... or, more correctly, Euthana*toi*... see themselves as keepers of the Wheel. That's a problematic duty, with fear and corruption its perpetual companions. The will to live is strong, and so the "good death" mages often find themselves cast in the murderer's role. Even the kindest of them – the ones who become medical professionals, priests, grief counselors, and so forth – spend most of their time around death and its complex passions. Each member of the group has himself died and been reborn. In a literal sense, the Euthanatoi carry a bit of death everywhere they go.

The group's name itself has been problematic. Aside from the mangled Greek in its common form, that "good death" title has defined the Tradition in murderous terms. Many Thanatoics prefer the old name, *Chakravanti*, or "people of the Wheel." As the Council moves toward its new form, the pressure to return to that name – or to choose another, *Niyamavanti*, "people of our Rule," that lacks the baggage of those old names – increases. After all, if individuals can reincarnate themselves, why shouldn't the Tradition based around reincarnation do the same?

Reincarnation forms a vital part of this Tradition. These mages don't just believe in it – they know from personal experience that reincarnation exists. Rooted in a fusion of reincarnationist creeds from India, Greece, Africa, Tibet, and elsewhere, the group keeps the Great Wheel spinning. In the old days, this was easier. People lived, they died, they joined the Wheel and returned to live new lives. But between the spread of one-life creeds, materialist atheism, resuscitation techniques, titanic wars, and the sheer *number* of living and dying people, the Great Cycle has been jammed. Abominations like vampires and other undead things have multiplied. The material and spiritual realms have been packed with ghosts of many kinds, and although the Avatar Storm might have offered a housecleaning of sorts, the Wheel has required... shall we say, more *direct* forms of maintenance. And so, reincarnationists have, all too often, been forced to become killers. Even so, life, not death, is the true heart of this Tradition. Above all things, the Wheel must be maintained.

Organization: Like their Verbena and Ecstatic allies, the Chakravanti pursue a sometimes sinister Path that other mages often fear and rarely understand. Yet among the Traditions, this group is perhaps the most ethical. Their awful responsibility demands no less. The group's strict code – the *Dharmachakra*, or "Eight-Spoked Wheel of the Law" – emphasizes the Cycle (*Samsara*); unity of all things

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: The most fascinating parade of visionaries, misfits, bastards, and heroes ever to walk the Earth and survive the experience for long.

The Technocracy: Slick pride-monsters taking a metallic dump on the Great Wheel.

The Disparates: Conventional wisdom says they're dead... but dead things have a way of coming back around.

(*Advaita*); acceptance of mortality (*Kala*); responsible guardianship (*Pravitra*); self-control (*Dama*); compassion (*Daya*); avoidance of temptation (*Tapas*); and the personal experience of death and rebirth (*Punarjanman*). Although the group itself lacks rigid hierarchies, all members of this Tradition are expected to know and follow this code, on pain of final death and removal from the Wheel.

This strict code requires strong bonds between mentors and initiates. As a result, although the death-Tradition contains many different sects, the relationship between a teacher (*Acarya*) and her student (*Chatra*) is essential. The Chatra swears a *Vrata* ("life-oath") to both his mentor and to the Tradition as a whole. Breaking that oath disgraces not only the student but the teacher as well... and compels the Acarya to hunt her student down for punishment.

Initiation: Each Thanatoic mage undergoes the *Diksha*: a ritualized physical death. Returning from the Shadowlands, that person undergoes a long apprenticeship that includes memorizing the Niyama and learning the many arts of healing, fate, and murder. Such apprenticeships can last for years and typically involve quests, tests, and challenges in which the student confronts the awful implications of his Path. Without that awareness, after all, a "death-mage" is exactly what people think he is: a monster who's everything this Tradition has sworn to destroy.

Affinity Spheres: Entropy; Life or Spirit.

Focus: As masters of life, death, Fate, and Fortune, the Euthanatoi view magick as an extension of the Cycle. By turning the Wheel, these mages control probability as well as the forces of mortality. That turning focuses on the cyclical nature of existence, and so a Chakravat uses practices and instruments like crazy wisdom, faith, High Ritual, medicine-work, reality hacking, martial arts, shamanism, and occasionally Voudoun to direct those energies toward the desired end. Yoga has an essential place in this Tradition's Arts. *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos* might be the group's most common paradigm; others include *Everything's an Illusion*, *Creation's Divine and Alive*, and even, believe it or not, *It's All Good – Have Faith*.

Order of Hermes

I do not "manifest" change – I become change.

Just as Solomon bound spirits to his bidding, as Merlin raised a stable boy to kingship, as John Dee named Elizabeth's realm an Empire and then anchored it in time and space at Greenwich, so too do the Houses of Hermes turn the hidden wheels of the world. Their Arts are the most refined, their knowledge the most exhaustive, their Wills the most dedicated to excellence. In many minds (most especially their own), the Order of Hermes defines the word *mage*.

As the largest and most organized Tradition, the Order of Hermes has influenced – they would say "defined" – the Western experience of magick. Hermetics command a huge range of secrets and wards. Their wealth is vast, their Wonders potent, their libraries breathtaking. The Order boasts the greatest number of Chantries, Masters, and Archmages. Its achievements include the first codification of magickal study, the formulation of the Spheres, and, indeed, the formation of the Traditions themselves.

Still, the Order has faced setbacks and catastrophes: the loss of both its greatest Chantry, Doissetep, and its leading Master, Porthos Fitz-Empress; the extermination (some say "self-destruction") of its most powerful luminaries; the devastation of priceless archives. Yet the reaction from other Traditions appears to be a collective sigh of relief. Why?

Because Hermetic wizards are, to a one (and to a fault), meticulous, pedantic, majestic, and haughty. The Preface to the venerable *Hornbook* – a thick volume presented to each new apprentice – captures this attitude in one paragraph: "What mage in any rival Tradition, of whatever skill, can boast the comprehensive knowledge of our least Adept? What other mage can offer any shred of theory to support his magick? The aboriginal shaman with his drums and rattle gives over his body to a spirit he knows not. The cleric with his song begs like a child for the favor of deities. The Ecstatic with his vice burns like a meteor and vanishes, and the witch with her blood-rites aspires only to procreate. Even the Akashic with his meditation and exercise seeks passive contentment in false belief. Meanwhile, the Hermetic with firm Will commands, *'Do!'* And *it is done.*"

This bombast reveals the Order's obnoxious confidence; the average Hermetic can back it up, too. Among the Traditions, only the Verbena and Dreamspeakers have as violent a history with the hated Technocracy. It's no accident that the Craftmasons (themselves formed from a renegade Hermetic sect) chose to initiate hostilities by blowing up one Hermetic citadel and to stage the Convention of the White Tower in another. Nor is it an accident that Master Baldric LaSalle chose to host the Mistridge Tribunal – the first step toward the Grand Convocation – in the ruins of that first attack. An Ecstatic might have provided the inspiration, and the Verbena might have secured new allies, but the Order of Hermes forged the foundation upon which the Traditions have been built.

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: Despite venerable practices and occasional insights, our allies lack the discipline to achieve lasting power or control. Even so, they have stood with us for centuries, so they remain worthy companions.

The Technocracy: In the end, only one of us will survive.

The Disparates: Talented amateurs, lost to their own separation.

Even rival Traditions accept the Order's vast and spectacular history. In ancient Egypt, two auspicious precursors invented the alphabet. Archmagus Solomon bound many spirits that still serve the Order today. Pythagoras founded the cult of Hermes in Greece. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus ("Thrice-Great Hermes"), forms the basis of the modern Tradition. Even Sleepers recall a few Hermetics from those storied times: Merlin. Paracelsus. Saint-Germain. Cagliostro. From Gandalf to Crowley to Potter, the popular acceptance of magick has arisen from Hermetic archetypes. In the new millennium, the group enjoys more popular acceptance than ever before. The Masses might not *pursue* the Hermetic Arts, but in a subconscious sort of belief, they accept the Order's ways as the face of Western wizardry.

And so, though their various setbacks have cost the Order dearly, Hermetic mages greet this age with renewed vitality. The loss of the Archmages, the destruction of Doissetep, the war against vampires, the purge of corrupt House Janissary... they're all like the collapsing Tarot Tower: the shattering of bondage that compels transformation. This age's Hermetics are rolling up their sleeves and remaking the Order from its foundations while keeping those foundations – confidence, knowledge, excellence, and Will – intact. Guided by a vision of the City of Pymander – the ideal of global Ascension under Mystic Will – Hermetics remain committed to perfection. Given their high purpose, they can accept no less.

Organization: The Order is rigidly hierarchical, disciplinarian, and regulated. The *Code of Hermes* and its *Peripheral Corrigenda* dictate behavior, protocol, rules for certámen challenges, and the proper inscriptions for Chantry doorways. Thirteen Houses still exist as factions in the Order's endless, brutal infighting. Some Houses predate the Norman Conquest (**Bonisagus**, **Flambeau**, **Quaesitor**, **Tytalus**, **Verditius,** and the catch-all **Ex Miscellanea**); others are newer, even quite recent (**Fortunae**, **Hong Lei**, **Ngoma**, **Shaea**, **Skopos**, **Solificati,** and **Xaos**).

Initiation: Recruited from academia, esoteric religious orders, science, or the military, a student must survive a punishing apprenticeship under an unforgiving mentor (a *mater* or *pater*). The Order recognizes nine Degrees of mystic advancement: *Neophyte*, *Zelator*, *Practicus*, *Initiate*, *Initiate Exemptus*, *Adept*, *Adept Major*, *Magister Scholae*, and *Magister Mundi*. The training aims to provoke, by the conclusion of the Third Degree, a gradual Awakening more akin to a *process* than to a single jolting moment.

Affinity Sphere: Forces provides the core of Hermetic training. Certain Houses favor Life, Matter, Mind, and Spirit as secondary pursuits, but Forces is always essential.

Focus: A Hermetic mage commands nothing less than the keys to the universe. And so, these consummate scholars master ancient and arcane rituals through constant study and intense practice. Tapping elemental currents through incantations, signs, seals, paraphernalia, and secret languages, the Hermetics are – by necessity – secretive and suspicious. They command tremendous power, after all, and their rivals lurk everywhere.

Alchemy, dominion, and High Ritual form core practices within the Order's ranks. No Hermetic mage lacks such training. Certain Hermetics add chaos magick, the Art of Desire, hypertech, craftwork, weird science, yoga, and occasional malficia to that core, pursuing such paradigms as *A Mechanistic Cosmos*, *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, *Might is Right*, *Tech Holds All Answers* and, naturally, *Bring Back the Golden Age.*

Sons of Ether

Onwards and Upwards – All or None!

The only thing holding humanity back from achieving its yearned-for Utopia is the smallness of its imagination. So long as individuals allow society and its rulers to dictate the size and extent of their dreams, mundane boredom and all its attendant suffering shall persist. Even the magickal imaginations of most of the Nine Traditions are hampered by what was allowed them in times past by the Powers That Be, whether those powers were shamans, pharaohs, or priests. Only the future is free of these chains, unset and as yet undreamt of. Only the truly bold can make the future real in the present, and the Etherites are *nothing* if not bold!

A society of radical technomantic dreamers, the original Sons of Ether proved unfit for the confined and suffocating paradigm of the Technocracy. Although they adopted their current name at the turn of the 20th century, these Enlightened Scientists are both sons and daughters of their rallying theory: that of Ether, that subtle substance that lies behind the guise of all phenomena in the universe. Long criticized as a boys' club due to its early Victorian customs, the Etherites have progressed over the years. Although hardliners still insist upon propriety, the term *Society of Ether* has largely replaced the shopworn masculinity of the group's original name.

The Etherites trace their lineage back to ancient Troy, although few outside the Tradition accept this claim. Their foundation of natural philosophy was reputedly established among the pre-Socratic thinkers of Greece and the Mediterranean, recorded in a book titled (by its Islamic translators) the *Kitab-al-Alacir*, or Book of Ether. As the first Inspired (that is, Awakened) attempt at a systemic natural philosophy, the *Kitab* is revered by Etherites, many of whom Awakened when reading it.

From a loose intellectual tradition practiced by disparate individuals, the group finally gained a societal foundation with the establishment of Hermetic *House Golo* in Medieval Italy. This eventually became the *Natural Philosophers Guild*, and then, in the Victorian Era, the *Electrodyne Engineers*, whose fascination with the novel power of electricity promised to liberate the common man from physical and metaphysical darkness. Such idealism remains the heart of this Tradition. The Technocracy could not crush it. World wars could not purge it. Neither skepticism nor failure nor claims that Etherites are all mad and reckless can prevent these luminaries from bringing their magnificent Science to the world.

Yes, by the standards of most people (even those lunatics with whom they share company), most Etherites *are* eccentric. Bizarre. Perhaps even mad. But such madness is the flare of a nova encased by an all too human shell. In a world determined to be small, the Society of Ether breeds heroes. If those heroes demolish labs, companions, even… um, *cities*… upon occasion, such casualties are the cost of true Enlightenment. And the world is improved thereby. Is not the current age proof of this? Flying machines! Recording technology! People no longer die by the thousands from plagues

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: Fascinating allies, I suppose… but they call *us* mad?

The Technocracy: Obscenities to the name of Science, perverting wonder into control.

The Disparates: Footdraggers. *Mysterious* footdraggers, though. Certainly worthy of further study…

or starvation! (Well, perhaps except in those lands without much Science... a pity, that.) And so, despite its costs and obstacles, the Sons and Daughters of Ether remain dedicated to the advancement of wondrous *Science!*

In the 21st century, this Tradition has come into its own. The influence of science fiction – especially its Etherian offshoot, steampunk – in popular culture allows them to stand proudly at the forefront of human endeavors. Among all Traditions, only the Virtual Adepts (and sometimes the Akashayana) enjoy similar allowances from Paradox. Modern reality favors this weird Science, and although Etherites occasionally overreach themselves and suffer the Paradox Effect anyway, the Society of Ether manages to get away with... well, "murder" is such an ugly term. Let us say, instead, *magnificence*.

As far as their fellow Traditions are concerned, most Etherites seem like selfish egotists, pushing paradigms wherein individuals can excel while leaving the Masses behind. Only the Etherites (so they insist) seek to bestow the benefits of Awakened Science on *everyone*. "*All, or none!*" is their creed. As a result, they strive for recognition – not only from their Enlightened peers but from the Masses most of all. Such acceptance, they know, reflects the striving human spirit – a spirit that looks toward Tomorrow and the many marvelous Things to Come.

Organization: Etherites, despite their boisterous talk about society, are often fractious and competitive. Fellowship exists as an avenue for seeking praise; criticism merely prods you to go back to the lab and do better next time. Although many Etherites bury themselves in research for weeks on end with very little companionship, they eventually seek the company of their peers, no matter how obsessive their work becomes.

Initiation: Prospective Etherites tend to be selected by true Scientists, based on some sign or evidence of latent genius. These prospective initiates receive a test designed to force them to confront the implications of their ideas. Most often, the would-be Scientist is left to discover a copy of the *Kitab-al-Alacir*, whose concepts often serve to Awaken the spark of bigger, brighter accomplishments to come.

Affinity Spheres: Matter; Forces or Prime.

Focus: *Science!* Or, more accurately, an imaginative grasp of natural principles channeled through established physical and energetic technologies. Earthier than their Virtual Adept colleagues, these technomancers prefer to employ Science that can be seen, held, demonstrated, and confirmed even by the eyes of fools. To that end, Etherite Science is showy, romantic, and gracefully futuristic, even if that future looks more like classic science fiction than like mundane science fact.

As a practice, an Etherite may use anything that seems to work. Most Scientists, however, favor gloriously esoteric variations on alchemy, craftwork, cybernetics, hypertech, reality hacking, and, of course, weird science. Paradigms focus largely around concepts like *A Mechanistic Cosmos*, *Everything is Data*, *Might is Right*, and *Everything's an Illusion*, but they usually boil down to *Tech Holds All the Answers*.

VERBENA

EVERYTHING IS INTERTWINED. TO UNDERSTAND YOUR TEARS IS TO UNDERSTAND THE SKY.

Life is shit and piss and blood. Pain and pleasure are inevitable birthrights. Our spirits are not some transcendent separate thing but are instead the raw vitality of Life itself. Drawing from among the oldest mystic understandings, the Verbena Tradition views life as a wondrous, implacable cycle – a dance of elements in which a mage calls tunes but cannot herself resist the dance. This view scares the living hell out of most folks, and that's just how many Verbena like it. If you can't hang with the truth, they figure, just get the fuck out of the way!

Like the herb for which they're named, the Verbena (or, more correctly, *Verbenae*) excel at healing, divination, and purgation. No other Tradition understands Life magicks the way they do. Masters of shape-changing, animal affinities, plant craft, and weather work, Verbenae stay close to Nature in her truest forms... and some of those forms can be bloody indeed. Although it's rare, the Verbenae have been known to practice animal and human sacrifice. More often, they carve runes in their own skins, endure hideous ordeals, subject themselves to painful deprivations, and perform other acts of self-sacrifice in order to avoid harming other beings. Every Verbena grove has a World Tree, the living symbol of Creation as a whole. These trees have been stained red by the rituals performed in those groves; the darker the red, the more powerful the grove.

Although the Tradition itself formed in the 1400s, Verbena roots run far deeper. Like many mystic societies, these mages trace their origins to primal humanity's beginnings... and in their case, they're probably correct. The primordial Wyck, they say, embodied the first fusions of spirit, mind, and flesh. Essentially gods, they soon guided the first human beings toward wisdom and magick. The Old Ways, say these traditionalists, are the inheritance left by those entities, and the Verbenae – and perhaps the Dreamspeakers – are its truest heirs.

These Old Ways are, by most standards, harsh. Blood, sex, passion in its rawest forms – these are the tools most Verbenae prefer. Cold iron, worked wood, fires kindled with your bare hands, natural clothing, organic foods... the simpler it is, the more powerful its effects. Although some Verbenae make concessions to the modern world – cars, guns, perhaps a favorite TV show or two – this Tradition, by and large, remains stubbornly archaic. And though they can be compassionate in their way, Verbenae have no time or patience for weakness. To them, the comforts of a technological world breed sickness and laziness. "Until you spend a month," they'll tell you, "in the wild with nothing but the clothes on your back... or better yet, *without* them... you don't know jack shit about reality."

Organization: Covens – often numbering 13, nine, seven, or three – make up this group's foundation. Solitary Verbenae exist, but most members of this Tradition prefer

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: We're siblings of the blood – quarreling, dysfunctional, often hating one another's guts... but we'll kick anyone else's ass if they mess with us. One for all, for better and worse.

The Technocracy: Plain and simple, they're a disease.

The Disparate: In the new Burning Times, I'm afraid they've been consumed.

to work in groups. Women probably outnumber men overall, and they're granted more respect here than in most other groups. Many female mages gravitate toward this Tradition for that reason. Two leaders (taking priest and priestess roles although both might be male, female, or transgender) govern the larger covens, with a single witch in charge of three-person groups. Covens tend to favor older members over younger ones, and old-school covens can be quite autocratic. Although disputes often get resolved through votes, those votes might involve ordeals, tests, or combat.

This Tradition respects strong bloodlines. And so, whenever possible, Verbena covens follow family lineage. Each coven has a grove, though that grove might be a garden in the leader's back yard. Large meetings occur eight times a year, during the two equinoxes, the two solstices, and on Imbolc (Feb. 2), Beltane (May 1), Lammas (Aug. 1), and Samhain (Oct. 31). Plenty of Verbenae also gather at Christmas (Dec. 25) and on July 1, especially as shifts of climate and culture blur the distinction between Nature's seasonal cycles.

Initiation: Verbena newcomers undergo a ritual death and rebirth. An intense period of study, testing, and meditation climaxes in a distressing ordeal – sometimes illusionary, often real. If and when the coven members are satisfied with the initiate's trustworthiness and dedication, they call the elements as witnesses. As they were during the Burning Times, most Verbenae remain loyal unto death.

Affinity Spheres: Life; Forces.

Focus: Verbena Arts concentrate on doing a lot with very little. Their tools are practical as well as symbolic, with uses that reach back to antiquity. "Pagan" in every sense of that word, these magicks hold deep ties to Nature. Shape-changing, transformation, healing and injury, divination, purification, growth and withering, natural cycles, and the tricky ways of Fate are witch-folk specialties.

To all Verbenae, *Creation's Divine and Alive*. Because Creation, life, and divinity aren't particularly nice, other common Verbena paradigms include *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Might is Right*, *Bring Back the Golden Age*, and *Everything is Chaos*. Witchcraft is the group's core practice, with certain individuals favoring Voudoun, dominion, weird science, chaos magick, yoga, martial arts, High Ritual, cybernetics, the Art of Desire, craftwork, medicine-work, and even organic hypertech.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

IT'S ALL IN THE CODE: YOU, ME, THE WORLD, EVERYTHING.

What *is* real? When you see something, touch something, *know* something, is it real, or is it simply a collection of signals, bits of information, pieces of data that come together in your mind and make you think "*This is real*"? To the Virtual Adepts, *everything* – buildings, tools, plants, animals, people – can be represented as information. Figure out the code behind something, the Adepts claim, and you can figure out how to manipulate that thing, how to change it, improve it, or delete it. Since information is abstract, you don't even need to *touch* the thing you want to change. If you *know* it, you can adjust it just by changing the code. And you can change the code from *anywhere*.

The youngest Tradition began as a Technocratic Convention that was alienated by its former allies. Too radical for their peers, these Difference Engineers questioned too much and aspired too far. And for their presumption, they were punished; Alan Turing, an elite mathematician and cryptographer, was disgraced and destroyed. His death created a martyr, and that martyrdom – combined with other persecutions – led to the Engineers' defection and their rebirth as the Virtual Adepts.

That Technocratic past left a stigma that many mages remain unwilling to ignore. In return, most Adepts scorn the primitive methods of the other Traditions. Humanity, the Adepts believe, should not be subjected to limiting philosophies like religion, government, or nature. Instead, the Adepts strive toward a technological *singularity* in which humanity's limitations get dumped as people remake themselves into something better, brighter, and post-human. Why focus on getting back to nature or praying to absentee gods, after all, when you can change the world – and yourself – so that you no longer *need* nature and can *become* a god?

As their moniker implies, Virtual Adepts spend lots of time in a virtual world. If you can interact with other people or even control objects of the real world from your online telepresence, then why bother with the dismal reality of a leaky apartment building and a body made of limited, mortal meat? Even in this banal Meatspace, however, Virtual Adepts surround themselves with computers, monitors, digital notepads, smart phones, and all the latest technological toys. The most elite among them, though, have learned to manipulate reality without tech... a feat that highlights the group's command of the God Code inside Creation.

For all their futuristic acumen, these Adepts still consider themselves mages in the classic sense. Their Arts remake reality through vision, technique, and Will. A modern Adept might not call what she does magick (though many of them do), but she regards herself as a child of Mercury, the Trickster/

Stereotypes

Fellow Traditions: Ghosts in the machine – noisy, cranky, old as fuck, but haunting nevertheless. There's so much they have to teach, and so much more they have to learn.

The Technocracy: We're at war for the heart of this world... and the next. So respect the allies but take no prisoners.

The Disparates: **singsong** I know a see-cret...

Messenger God in the Machine. Like the Adepts, Mercury is everywhere at once, undermining assumptions with the audacity of his Arts. Especially in this era, when technology is both a road to freedom and an instrument of oppression, the world needs audacious tricksters. And so, the Adepts of the 21st century are growing far less virtual and far more *real*.

Organization: Merit-respecting anarchists, Adepts avoid standard organization and loathe conventional hierarchies. In the '90s, they based respect on eliteness: a form of peer recognition won through attitude and accomplishment. Though the tradition has matured and diversified since then, an Adept's personal achievements – rather than titles or seniority – still mean everything in this group's esteem. Cleverness, wit, technological creativity, and an astute sense of sociological reform mean more than a snappy handle or a keen online icon. There's a special reverence for Adepts who tear down oppressive social structures... and a vituperative loathing for ones who support such structures in Meatspace or the online world.

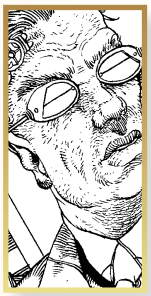
Initiation: Virtual Adepts have a socially brutal initiation process. The idea of physical deprivation, master-apprentice challenges, or meditative spirit quests strikes them as absurd. Instead, Adepts typically give their aspirants and initiates cryptic missions to sabotage authoritarian structures, steal classified data, and create amusing pranks that undermine corrupt bastards and expose pompous windbags. At some critical juncture, the initiate gets left to fend for herself; a suitably imaginative (and hopefully stylish) resolution to the problem earns the accolades of peers and a place among the Adepts. In short, then, most Adepts enter the group through the grand Internet tradition of trolling.

Affinity Spheres: Correspondence/ Data; Forces.

Focus: *Everything is Data*. Thus, in this *Mechanistic Cosmos*, every tool or practice an Adept employs focuses on shaping, altering, manipulating, gathering, storing, collating, influencing, or destroying information. Such tools range from the obvious computer gear (generations ahead of conventionally available tech), clouds, holograms, implants, nanotech, energy drinks, and sense-altering stimuli to the understated chic of dark hoodies, manga-influenced haircuts, fashionable androgyny, and provocative masks. All Adepts, however, keep the implements of their technomagick handy. For many Adepts, computers are a more important part of one's identity than any attire or accessory. An Adept's personal devices are almost always the most heavily customized and stylized elements of that Adept's ensemble.

Perhaps the most accomplished reality hackers alive, this Mercurian Elite also employs various forms of cybernetics, hypertech, weird science, martial arts, chaos magick, gutter magick, and sometimes shamanism, Voudoun, crazy wisdom, or witchcraft with a technological flair.

Part III: The Technocratic Union



"Again?"

DV4631, a.k.a. Daniel, nods. Outside his cop car, the flickering red and blue strobes toss shadows across my sleeping neighborhood. 3:21 is too damned early for this shit.

"Why the lights? Isn't that kind of conspicuous?"

"Playing the role," he says, gesturing me inside. "Your neighbors know you're a cop, so they're more likely to accept you getting into a car with a strange man if they see a cop car in emergency mode."

"I'm an admin." Shutting my eyes against the glare, I open the door and slide in.

"They don't know that."

"It's late."

"The world is full of eyes."

"Don't I fucking know it."

"Nice place," he says as I buckle in and sit tight. Daniel's car shoots out into the empty street. Residential zone, my ass. No wonder he used the strobes.

"We racing against Doomsday again?" I snark as his speedometer hits 50 and the tires squeal around a turn.

"Aren't we always?"

"True enough." I nod while the familiar streets flash past in a pre-dawn blur. I let myself smile – that high-grade grin that gets me whatever I want.

Daniel allows a slight smile to crease his own tight features. Behind his eyes, the green-light pinpricks shine. Night vision. Makes sense, even with the headlights and strobes. He'll see further than a normal driver could, and his reflexes trump anything else on the road at this hour. "It's good to see you again, Kevin," he says, not looking in my direction.

"You too," I admit as we roar off toward whatever Apocalypse we're off to stop this time...

WARNING, CITIZEN!

The following data is highly classified and restricted to members of the Technocratic Union. Very little of this material is known outside the Union, and that which has been transmitted beyond the halls of this august institution is inevitably misunderstood by parties without the proper levels of clearance and training. Employing such data without such training is extremely unmutual. Worse, it might compromise the principles of a previously held reality paradigm, engendering a divergence of sympathies and distorting future transmissions.

In plain English, this section reveals things that very few people outside the Technocratic ranks know. Unless you're a player or Storyteller who's involved with the Technocracy, this section is optional. Its secrets should never come into your chronicle as character knowledge. Oh, and if you were expecting faceless bad guys here, get ready to have those expectations shredded. The Technocracy is a complex entity, as heroic and flawed as the Traditions themselves.

Enlightened Potential

The future is here, whether we want it to be or not. Technology continually tests and redefines the boundaries of what it is to be human, recreating our culture for the sake of progress. The Masses of humanity continually contend with the same two questions. *Is technology changing to create the world that we want? Or is our world changing in ways we don't want for the sake of technology?* In other words, do we control technology, or does it control us? That issue of *control* might very well define the future of the human race.

Despite the acceleration of technology worldwide, the disparity between the Haves and the Have Nots remains a serious problem. Although cell phones and computers can be found throughout the so-called developing nations, those cultures still tend to become the dumping grounds and starvation-wage labor pools of the technological elite. As a result, the "insurgents" and "terrorists" who oppose that elite employ asymmetrical warfare, turning the elite's weapons against them. The Powers That Be respond with an unprecedented campaign of surveillance, redefining legality to monitor the Masses through cameras, intercept their emails, and listen in on cell-phone conversations. Before the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the option of drone strikes becomes an alternative to putting boots on the ground – that is, marching on enemy soil with conventional armies. For the sake of words like "safety" and "security," law enforcement agencies adopt new standards for search and seizure, as travelers on airlines line up for full-body scans. Although the necessity and expediency of these measures are up for debate, consider this: all those innovations occur without any kind of supernatural power.

Now imagine what's possible when that technology has few limits. Hidden from the Masses, a secret society has developed technology far beyond what the common populace possesses. That empowered elite uses Enlightened Procedures that employ technological tools; in the hands of such agents, experimental technology decades ahead of its time is no longer theoretical – it's *practical*. The fate of their world doesn't depend simply on the actions of anachronistic mages holding on to the Traditions of the past. It depends just as much on a caste of powerful technocrats working to redefine, restrict, and quantify the boundaries of reality. Long ago, they forged an alliance to multiply their technological advantage and advance human power against the nightmarish threats of predatory

monsters. Unifying many different conventions of bleeding-edge hypertech, these technocrats further their agenda through a global organization known as the *Technocracy*.

A Matter of Control

The Technocratic Union is the name given to a hypertech collective that advances technology as an alternative to anachronistic traditions of magick. Practitioners of those rival Traditions see this Technocracy as a restrictive society that eliminates anyone who won't conform to its practices... and with good reason. Just as the Nine Traditions conflict with one other, they remain perpetually in conflict with the Technocracy. At its worst, this clash breeds a battle in the shadows called *the Ascension War* – and like many wars, its victory is up for debate. The Nine Traditions have diversity but not unity. Anyone can Awaken to the limitless possibility of magick, but its unrestrained practice can have unforeseen consequences. The Technocracy fights to limit those possibilities, reshaping the world in its own image by opposing all alternatives.

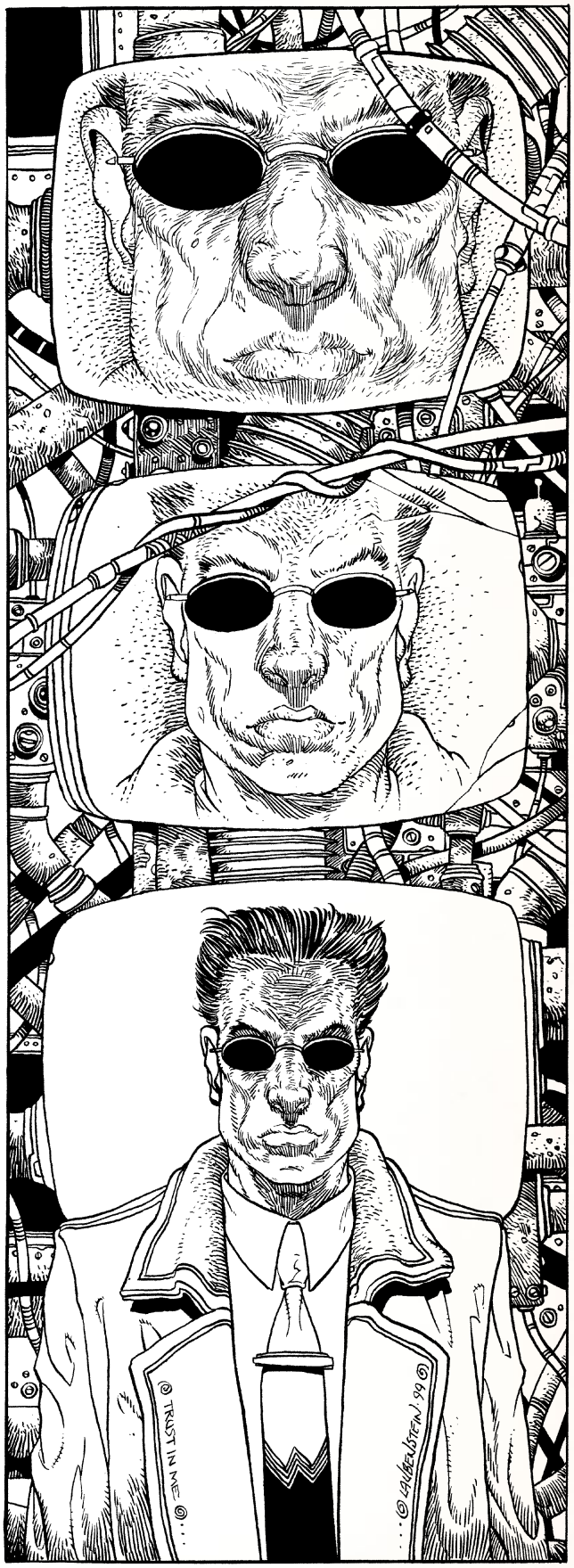
Of course, these Technocratic methods may seem extreme. Consider, though, the horrors of a world truly without enforced boundaries. Imagine, if you will, a freeway without speed limits – the high-octane chaos of metal and momentum. Wouldn't you want a police officer to pull over that reckless driver who's speeding in the wrong direction, weaving in and out of traffic and probably headed straight toward *you?* And what would happen if a driver's license weren't required... or insurance... or knowledge of the law? Even with all of these restrictions, speed kills and humans complain endlessly about everyone *else's* actions. That's human nature, after all. But human nature demands authority, both to comfort its hurts and to control its extremes.

And that's especially true when it comes to magick.

Just look at the damage caused by cars, guns, or careless words. Now multiply that by the potential to call storms down or throw mountains around. If each human held the potential to mold reality, that reality would be hell for everything on Earth. Beyond the passions and stupidities of the human condition, reality itself craves structure. Just as physical laws channel and limit the forces of nature, so must metaphysical laws channel and limit the forces of reality. Without a standardized set of rules and principles, after all, endless variations of magickal practice become a series of disasters waiting to happen. *Someone* must attempt to police that reality.

For over a century and counting, the Technocracy has accepted that challenge. Despite popular misconceptions, they're the good guys in a world gone mad.

Oh, it's true that they've been known to breed monsters. Cyborgs, HIT Marks, clone warriors and bat-winged Chihuahuas occasionally make the rounds when the Union goes to war. But then, war *is* always ugly, and every veteran gets his or her hands bloody doing things that would give nightmares to the folks back home. It's the guardian's burden to perform duties most people cannot do, and it's his glory to do so with honor and skill. And so the Technocratic Union, far from being the soulless monolith portrayed in Tradition propaganda, becomes the necessary evil in a World of Darkness. Without its agents,



after all, the Reality Deviants – vampires, beast-men, demonic forces, and gore-handed sorcerers – would run rampant, as they did long ago. Peace, comfort, and stability would still be dreams. Control, then, is the price of keeping the human dream alive.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Technocracy enacted a *Pogrom* against RD influence. Named for a Russian word meaning "through thunder," this Pogrom was intended to wipe out the last vestiges of Nazi, Fascist, and Imperial Japanese occultism. Given the large numbers of Tradition and Technocracy members who'd joined the Axis powers, it's not surprising that the Pogrom began purging dissidents from all factions. The Traditions, of course, protested the Pogrom with martial intensity. Soon the purge was aimed not only at former Nazis and Fascists but at any Reality Deviant unlucky enough to attract its attention. Eventually, "Pogrom" became the official name for all operations aimed at dangerous superstitionists, renegade Technocrats, and other enemies of the Union. And as in every crusade, questions about morality and viciousness were silenced with appeals to the greater good. Tough jobs, after all, demand dirty hands.

It's so easy to view such actions as unmitigated evil. How high a price would *you* be willing to pay, though, in order to save humanity from threats you knew were there... especially if someone else were picking up the tab? To keep this safe little world intact, the Technocracy pays that price each day in blood, sweat, toil, and tears. Yes, they *do* cry... and bleed... and sweat. Unlike the automatons they occasionally employ, Enlightened Technocrats are essentially human beings – "mages," if you must use that term, in the classical sense, though not ones who would call what they do "magick." When you get behind the black hats and mirrorshades, a Technocracy agent is a painfully and magnificently *aware* human being who is dedicated to the greater cause of orderly control. And if that control means that some spell-slinging voodoo hippie has to have his face kicked in or his mind rearranged... well, then, that's a small price tag on the greater good. Those who cannot abide by the rules have to suffer the consequences, and if a Technocrat must surrender his personal wishes in order to shoulder the burden of payment, he'll accept that duty with a smile.

The Uplift Ideal

Beyond the need to protect humanity from the many horrors of its world, the Technocracy has a grander purpose: to uplift us to a greater state, purging the animal flaws that chain us to a world of hate, fear, and ignorance. That, truly, is the foundation of the Technocratic ideal, and it's a vision that the group's rivals refuse to see.

The average Technocrat does not view himself as a fascist monstrosity but as a savior working for the common good. The undeniable benefits of technological uplift – running water, antibiotics, reliable supplies of food and other necessities, increased equality, and many other things – prove the rightness of the Technocratic cause. The Technocracy exists not to *oppress* humanity but to *elevate* it. Yes, that process can be grueling. Yes, it demands unpalatable methods. Yes, it requires sacrifices from the Union as well as from its enemies. But really – the ideal of a better, brighter, more enlightened world *IS* the Union's motivation. Behind the mechanisms of command and control stand human beings dedicated to (and even, dare we say it, compassionate about) the human spirit and the boundless potential it displays.

Goals and Ideals: The Precepts of Damian

Although the Technocracy can trace its origins back to the Order of Reason in the 14th century – and if Technocratic scholars are correct, even to the dawn of human civilization – its formal foundation began in the late 19th century. According to Technocratic history, a diplomat named Professor Damian sat in the drawing room of Queen Victoria and meticulously detailed the ideals of his secret society. Damian was the representative of a secretive cabal of ancient masters, Enlightened scholars who debated its ideals while secluded in the rarefied isolation of their own Horizon Realm... or, as the Technocrats call such places, a *Colony* or *Horizon Construct*.

That organization took on the name of *the Inner Circle;* its plan for the new Technocracy was called the *Time Table,* and the list of its collective ideals became known as *The Precepts of Damian.* These six Precepts summarize the foundation of the Technocratic ethic – and, as with many static organizations, those rules haven't changed much since their inception. Every Technocratic operative memorizes the Precepts and can recite the party line... even if he might want to debate the particulars in private. Where and when he has those debates – and who hears them – can shape an agent's career; after all, in even the most idealistic of organizations, individuals have their doubts.

Order, Stasis, and Consensus

Bring Stasis and order to the Universe. Predictability brings safety. Once all is discovered and all is known, Unity will be won.

Magick, by its very nature, is unpredictable and capricious. Elite Technocrats work with experimental and unpredictable technology, but their ultimate goal is to standardize that tech. Their futuristic innovations are tested and iterated until those inventions become safe and predictable tools that can benefit humanity. Think of the Technocrats, if you will, as the ultimate alpha testers – the earliest of early adopters.

Instead of "spells," "talismans" and "rituals," Technocrats develop *Procedures*, *Adjustments*, *Devices,* and *Processes*, training their operatives to minimize the inherent risks of Enlightened Science. Although vulgar willworking is possible (using what agents call *blatant Procedures*), it's actively discouraged. Coincidental willworking (or as agents call it, *subtle Procedures*) is far more predictable, largely because it almost always appears as advanced technology or scientific applications. This way, the impossible becomes commonplace and predictable. Instead of a world of supernatural horror and endless mystery, the Union tames a world in which everything can be defined, classified, quantified, and ultimately controlled.

Thanks to *Anthropic Field Theory* (a Technocratic explanation for the effects of human beliefs upon reality), human consciousness directs the flow of Earthly phenomena. Technocrats do not program that flow so much as they direct it along the most desirable outcomes

Future Fates: The Dimensional Anomaly and a "Kinder, Gentler Technocracy"

According to many sources, the Technocracy rose up at the end of the millennium, nuked the spirit world, and then cleaned house and drove all mystic factions skittering into the shadows. Triumphant, the Union stood like a conqueror over the Earth, its metallic boot heel planted firmly on humanity's collective trachea.

Not quite.

Yes, the end of the 20th century sees various upheavals, the severity and effects of which depend upon your choice of metaplot elements. But those upheavals might also have cracked parts of the Technocracy's vaunted command. The Avatar Storm – known by Technocrats as the *Dimensional Anomaly* – disrupts access to Horizon Constructs and Colonies, cuts the Front Lines off from the Inner Circle, guts the ranks of the Void Engineers, and brings many Earthbound Technocrats face to face with the frailties of their own practices. After a briefly intensified Pogrom, the Union confronts its excesses and refocuses on perfecting science and technology for their own sakes. This redirection nurtures the Technocracy's more human side (especially among the mechanized ranks of Iteration X) for good and ill. Certain "machineocrats" wind up softening their rigidity, but the mortal flaws of greed, selfishness, and distraction begin undermining Technocratic stability... possibly enhancing a Nephandic infiltration, or maybe countering it instead. (See the sidebar ***In Secrecy, This Infection***...)

Evidence of this Nephandic endgame can be found in the fracturing relationships between the five Conventions as the new millennium sees a growing schism within the Union. One particular event, referred to as *the Greylocke Incident* of 2006, causes a major rift between Iteration X and the New World Order. Stories differ, of course, but the end result of a fight between Iteration X shock troops and the Hermetic mages of the Greylocke Chantry is a monumental explosion that kills or injures hundreds of Technocrats, particularly among the NWO. This, combined with the financial crash of 2008 and the rising tide of rebellion among the Masses, pushes the New World Order toward a defensive leadership role. The Syndicate and Progenitors grow closer, Iteration X flounders, and the Void Engineers – having suffered the worst losses from the Dimensional Anomaly – close ranks, adopt a military leadership called the *Existential Threats Directorate*, or ETD, and wage a determined campaign of salvage and war.

By 2012, the Union faces a potential split down the middle with the NWO on one side, the Syndicate on the other, and the other three Conventions deciding which way to go if and when a civil war erupts.

Is all of this a reflection of a supposedly infallible machine? Or are internal forces deliberately playing the Union against itself? The truth, like so many other elements of the Technocratic Union, remains mysterious.

Is the Union still an implacable force of enlightened tyranny in your chronicle? Or has the Dimensional Anomaly cleaned house and allowed a newer breed of Technocrats to question the old order and usher in reforms... with better and worse results?

That depends. Perhaps...

- **The Union remains Earthbound:** The Dimension Storm still rages; most extraterrestrial Constructs have been destroyed. The Void Engineers have gone hardcore. The NWO has literally lost Control, and Iteration X has been cut off from Autocthonia and, as a result, has become more human and less machine. HIT Marks have been largely phased out in favor of power-armor Hardsuits and personal enhancements. Aside from the efforts of the Panopticon, the Pogrom is largely on hold unless someone presents a distinct threat to the Earth at large. The Technocracy now faces the combination of rebellious human belief, internal schisms, potential Nephandic corruption, and the ominous *Threat Null* (see below).
- **The Storm has faded, but the scars remain:** The brief catastrophe *did* change the Union's tactics, priorities, and resources, but not quite as radically as in option #1. Many Constructs are operational, the Colonies have suffered losses but are rebuilding, and the potential malignancy within the Union is perhaps more intense than it had been before... but the Union *has* become more humane and is looking at long-term reform. If the Nephandi *are* in charge, however, that might not be a good thing at all...
- **Nothing has changed:** As in '90s-era **Mage**, the Technocracy dominates both the Earth and those off-world settlements. The Inner Circle never stopped giving commands, the Machine still rules Autocthonia, and idealistic Technocrats still struggle with the divide between compassionate control and unquestionable compliance.

As with so many other Future Fates elements – especially ones that deal with the Technocracy – such decisions and their implications are best kept Classified, with players discovering the truth on a need-to-know basis only.

for humanity at large. Thus, although a technological elite leads the Technocracy, many agents believe that their Union fights for a world in which reality is shaped by the common populace – by *the Masses*, not by an anachronistic alliance of mages. The world these agents create is the world that humanity wants – in Technocratic terminology, the *Consensus*, the ultimate manifestation of the Anthropic Field Theory. Eventually, the Masses will get to share the same advanced technology that the Technocracy employs. Once the Union's power becomes fully invested and integrated into human discourse and its Consensus, such radical measures

will no longer be experimental. They will be predictable. They will be controlled. In short, they will be the very *opposite* of magick.

Technology and Training

Convince the Masses of the benevolence of science, commerce, and politics and of the power of Rationality. Conflict and suffering will be eliminated in our Utopia.

With a handful of exceptions, such as heightened perception and psychic ability, a technomancer must use technological instruments (or more precisely, *apparatus*) to perform any given Procedure. His tools are the tools of science. When the Technocracy acts, it acts in secret – but when the Masses see the results, the Technocracy's success reveals the triumph of science. Anarchists and terrorists – RDs or otherwise – get caught or destroyed by high-tech surveillance and firepower. Suffering and disease are eliminated with Progenitor medicine and Iteration X prosthetics. Corporations create wealth and opportunity with Syndicate financing. Whenever the Technocracy triumphs, the Masses witness the benefits of innovative science, dedicated commerce, controlled politics, and reasonably manufactured consent. Advancing these sciences brings humanity closer to Utopia.

Future Fates: In Secrecy, This Infection...

As revealed in various sourcebooks – most notably **Guide to the Technocracy** and the original **Technocracy: Syndicate** and **Void Engineers** books – the Union is also infested with Nephandi and the cosmic source of corruption the werewolves call *the Wyrm*. The **Sorcerers Crusade** line (notably in **Infernalism: The Path of Screams**) suggests that this corruption has been going on for centuries. Despite the presence of many sincere and dedicated Technocrats, the Inner Circle has turned the Union into an instrument of global malignance.

This metaplot has been an undertone since the very first sourcebooks; after all, how could places like Null-B, MECHA, or Research Plantation No. 4 be anything *but* corrupt...? Even so, certain groups might wish to give the Technocracy the benefit of the doubt. Thus, when looking at the truth behind its behavior, a Storyteller can choose from the following three options:

- **The Technocracy has Fallen:** In this option, the Inner Circle is essentially a Nephandic playground. Most ranking Technocrats are either *barabbi* or were never true Technocrats to begin with. The Union has been exterminating its rivals, purging dissent, and driving humanity toward self-destruction. Although some Technocrats mean well and have been fighting against corruption, it's essentially a doomed effort. The Technocracy is fucked, and it has been for ages.
- **The Union has problems but is not metaphysically corrupt:** Despite a few bad apples and a ruthless approach to Ascension, the Technocratic Union is *not* overrun with Nephandi. The corruption that *does* exist is an extension of hubris, not infiltration by the Fallen. Essentially, the Union means well but has a brutal way of taking care of business.
- **There's corruption, but they're dealing with it:** Yes, some Nephandi have warped the Union's purpose. And yeah, the Technocracy's brutal. But still, the Union can be saved. Devoted Technocrats – inspired and sometimes led by Secret Agent John Courage – have been fighting a covert war within the Technocracy... and despite major losses and obstacles, there's still hope for the Technocracy's redemption.

Threat Null

More recently, the **Revised Convention Book: Void Engineers** postulated a similar infection: *Threat Null*, an Otherworldly reflection of Technocratic excess. According to this sourcebook – which depends heavily upon the Dimensional Anomaly metaplot – a deeply corrupted version of the Technocracy exists beyond the Gauntlet, possibly made up of lost members of the Union itself. Essentially, Threat Null consists of cruel parodies of Iteration X, the NWO, the Progenitors, and the Syndicate, taken to their utmost extremes. Is there a Void Engineer analogue as well? Good question. The VEs don't want to look too deeply into that mirror because the answers might destroy them.

Aside from vague mutterings, the Void Engineers are keeping Threat Null very Classified with regards to their fellow Conventions. Afraid (and with good reason!) that exposure of Threat Null might rip apart their unstable Union, the Engineers are trying to contain that Threat and neutralize it in secret. Paradoxically, that secrecy might do even more damage if and when the secret slips out into the Technocracy... or worse, reaches *outside* of the Technocracy! The insidious agents of Threat Null insinuate themselves into positions of power throughout the Union, often hidden until some catastrophe reveals their presence.

So, is Threat Null a Nephandic plot? Is it an independent phenomenon arising from a quirk of metaphysics? Might it be *both*, or does it exist at all? That's for your Storyteller to know and you to find out... maybe. In any case, *Threat Null is NOT common knowledge to anyone*, and the Void Engineers are working hard to keep things that way.

Details about Threat Null can be found in **Convention Book: Void Engineers**, pps. 65-69.

Important Note: Once you as the Storyteller have chosen an option, *DON'T TELL YOUR PLAYERS WHAT IT IS.* Let them discover the truth over the course of your chronicle, not through an automatic assumption of Technocratic corruption. It's far more dramatic if the extent and nature of such corruption remains a mystery.

Safety and Security

Preserve the Gauntlet and the Horizon. Chaotic individuals who open gateways with impunity threaten the stability of our world. Uncontrolled portals also allow outside forces, such as Nephandi, access to our world. This must never happen.

The world is already a dark and dangerous place, with hazardous degrees of paranormal influence. Even greater dangers lurk in the various dimensions outside our world. No other organization on Earth has the talent, training, resources, and organization to stand against these threats. Void Engineers maintain and patrol the Gauntlet between our world and its limitless alternatives. The New World Order's surveillance scans the planet for extradimensional incursions, sending teams to erase all evidence of its existence while also working with other dedicated teams that eradicate EDEs: Extra-Dimensional Entities. The Union doesn't just watch the world on this side of the Dimensional Membrane, however. It must also subject its own citizens to this same vigilant surveillance, looking for signs of Nephandic corruption, Marauder insanity, and, of course, disloyal collaboration with Tradition rivals. The Union *must* stay united; if it doesn't, then those patrols of the Gauntlet and Horizons could lapse, and all of humanity could suffer.

Note that the highest echelons of the Technocracy are well aware of the threat presented by the Marauders and Nephandi. The degree to which madness and corruption have infested the Enlightened elite remains a topic of speculation. That speculation, in turn, motivates vigilance, suspicion, and sometimes paranoia. *Anyone* can be corrupted by power, so even in the most esteemed ranks of the Union's Inner Circle, the Enlightened watch one another for signs of deviance. Of course, such vigilance can turn to rivalry, especially if one elitist attempts to make a temporary alliance with a Marauder or Nephandus (or even a Traditional mage!) in order to conspire against his peers.

Knowledge and Surveillance

Define the nature of the universe. Knowledge must be absolute, or chaos will envelop all. The elemental forces of the universe must not be left to the caprices of the unknown.

The Union seeks to analyze and evaluate all possible threats to humanity, most especially paranormal ones. Technocrats cannot oppose what they cannot understand, so the Technocracy gathers as much information as possible about everything. Absolute knowledge furthers absolute security. In a World of Darkness, privacy is a hazardous illusion.

Of course, the Masses lack Enlightened insight (and magickal ability), so they remain unprepared for, and often undefended against, the predations of the supernatural world. If humanity truly understood the full extent of paranormal Deviance, the result would be chaos. Thus, the Technocracy investigates and gathers hidden lore about magickal and mystical activity. Contrary to the stereotype, agents don't need to destroy anything that can't be explained through science... but they *do* need to investigate and gather enough data to predict, and deal with, paranormal phenomena and mystical entities.

Progress and the Pogrom

Destroy Reality Deviants. Their recklessness threatens our security and our progress toward Unity.

This is the most frequently debated Precept; the Technocracy can't eliminate all possible alternatives to its society, so it has to prioritize the obvious threats to the Masses' security. In theory, anyone who is not trained and managed by the Technocracy deviates from its established procedures and protocols. In practice, the Union doesn't have limitless resources to fight everything it doesn't understand, so it must choose when to campaign or crusade for reality. At some points in its history, most notably at the end of the 20th century, any mage who had allied with the Nine Traditions or the ramshackle Crafts was considered a Reality Deviant, marked for surveillance, indoctrination, or assassination – they were the "hot zones" of the Ascension War.

This, however, isn't a constant state of open warfare. The Technocracy and its rivals often exist in a state of cold war, in which each side watches the other, conducting minor skirmishes without unleashing shock-and-awe firepower. The New World Order is especially good at subtle indoctrination, recruitment, and Social Conditioning (which its detractors would call "brainwashing") to convert rivals with great potential. Iteration X, meanwhile, develops state-of-the-art training for the alternative to conversion: obliteration of anything its soldiers put in their crosshairs.

Enlightenment and the Empowered Elite

Shepherd the Masses; protect them from themselves and from others.

Here's another controversial Precept; when agents debate this point, however, they certainly don't do it *openly*, because dissent could be considered disloyalty... or worse, treason. Someone needs to evaluate the threats humanity cannot detect or oppose; someone needs to innovate experimental technology and then reduce it to a fairly safe form. Someone needs to review and train agents and allies so they can use their power responsibly. That, then, is why the Technocracy evolved into the pyramidal structure it has today: the oldest and most powerful Enlightened operatives govern younger and less powerful agents. Humanity, on the whole, gets shepherded by a secret society of the technological elite, and radicals who cannot conform or obey its dictates are reprogrammed, repurposed, or eliminated.

This precept provides one of the reasons the Union patrols so vigilantly for Reality Deviants. The worst Deviants openly rely on vulgar magick; when the Masses witness such excesses, the boundaries of reality are tested. Impossible things suddenly seem more possible. Paradox punishes those who deviate against it, of course, and the Traditions have their own methods of punishing their own kind, but the Technocracy takes on Reality Deviants who break the laws of reality again and again. In this way, they shepherd the Masses, because humanity is defenseless against wolves like magickal predators and Deviants. If a mage uses vulgar magick repeatedly, the Technocracy will hunt him down; if the offender can't be converted, then he must be destroyed. Humanity can't protect itself against these threats. Again, the Technocracy bravely accepts this challenge.

Technocratic Ranks and Designations

Within the Union, each Convention has its own designations of rank. The five levels, however, all correspond to one another in similar fashion, with supreme command vested in Control, also known as the Ivory Tower, which brings all five Conventions together into a single unit atop the hierarchy.

In the Dimensional Anomaly metaplot, the Avatar Storm cut that top rank off from the Earthbound Technocracy. The lower ranks have reorganized themselves into a five-tier hierarchy, and that top level prefers the term *Managers* rather than *Masters*.

Rank	Position
1	Unenlightened support personnel
2	Extraordinary citizens/ initiated operatives
3	Agents/ operatives
4	Supervisors
5	Managers/ Masters
6	Control/ The Ivory Tower

Each Convention also has *Methodologies*, groups that pursue specialized work within the Union. Unlike the messily individual subsects within the various Traditions, these Methodologies all have specific duties and functions within their Convention.

ITERATION X

Methodologies: BioMechanics, Macrotechnicians, Statisticians, Time-Motion Managers (TMM)

Rank	Designation
1	Laborers (a.k.a. Kamrads or "proles")
2	Ciphers
3	Armatures
4	Armature Specialists (formerly *Programmers*)
5	Comptrollers

NWO

Methodologies: the Feed, the Ivory Tower, the Operatives, Q Division, the Watchers

Rank	Designation
1	Sympathizers
2	Black Suits/ Extraordinary Citizens
3	Operatives, Reporters, and Gray Suits
4	Intelligence Analysts
5	Gatekeepers and White Suits

PROGENITORS

Methodologies: Applied Sciences, Damage Control, FACADE Engineers, Genegineers, Pharmacopeists

Rank	Designation
1	Technicians/ Research Assistants
2	Street Ops and Recruiters
3	Students
4	Research Associates and Primary Investigators
5	Research Directors/ Councilors

SYNDICATE

Methodologies: Disbursements, Enforcers, Financiers, Media Control, Special Projects Division (SPD)

Rank	Designation
1	Providers (a.k.a. Staples or Our Friends)
2	Associates (a.k.a. Magic Men)
3	Managers (a.k.a. Wizards)
4	Chairmen (a.k.a. Vision Men)
5	Vice Presidents of Operations (VPOs)

VOID ENGINEERS

Methodologies: Border Corps Division (BCD), Earth Frontier Division (EFD), Neutralization Specialist Corps (NSC), Pan-Dimensional Corps (PDC), Research & Execution (RAE)

Rank	Designation
1	Technicians and Marines
2	Students
3	Investigators, Security, and Scientists
4	Investigators, Security, and Scientists (no formal title changes from Rank 3)
5	Either the Dimensional Sciences Evaluation, Administration, and Training Committee (DSEATC) or the Existential Threats Division (ETD), depending upon depending upon the metaplot.

A Note About Ascension

Any one of these Precepts could be considered a goal for the Ascension of an individual agent. All of them must be upheld, of course, but a single agent is invariably more insightful and talented when she chooses to advance one of these goals. In time, such dedication can lead her to a higher state of consciousness. Although the word "ascension" is considered a regressive, superstitionist holdover, that higher state of consciousness is certainly an admirable goal.

As far as the Technocracy is concerned, such ascension generally involves an *Empowered* vision of the ideal world. Even so, each individual Technocrat can be inspired to greater things by pursuing her role within that world. Higher consciousness provides greater service to the Union and its purposes. Although the ideal goal of an Enlightened Technocrat is *collective*, not *personal*, there's still room for individual transcendence and perfection within that ultimate ideal. (See ***Enlightenment and Empowerment: The Collective and the Individual***, below.)

Organization and Rank

From the Union's earliest origins as the Order of Reason, a Technocrat's rank within his secret society has depended upon his degree of Enlightenment. Each Convention has its own methods for recruiting, evaluating. and promoting its personnel but, roughly speaking, six degrees of Enlightenment define rank within most of the Technocracy. (In game terms, Enlightenment is what mages call *Arete*, although – as with the Traditions – increasing your Enlightenment Trait doesn't automatically increase your rank.)

Despite the propagandistic image of the Technocratic monolith, the Union is not some featureless block of stone. And although the Technocracy itself refers to its leadership as *the Ivory* (or *White*) *Tower* – a reference to the Convention of the White Tower, where the Order of Reason began – an organizational chart for the Technocracy more closely resembles a pyramid. In that pyramid, the lowest-ranking citizens form a wide base for the edifice. As an Enlightened citizen ascends in rank, however, he finds fewer and fewer peers and rivals. From the apex, an all-seeing eye watches over this secret society, conducting surveillance for an Inner Circle of Control. In the middle, various levels of agents, operatives, specialists, scientists, researchers, managers, and executives all perform the necessary tasks that keep the Time Table as precise as possible. Each level supports the others in a designated fashion, allowing for clear and orderly command.

Methodologies

Each of the five Conventions supports a collection of Methodologies: departments within the convention that pursue specialized functions within the purview of that Convention. Under the departmental umbrella of the NWO, for instance, the Ivory Tower deals with history, leadership, and academia; the Operatives handle field work; and the Watchers deal with surveillance, reporting, and mass media. A new Methodology, the Feed, works with the Internet in general and social media in particular, and Q Division – though not a Methodology in its own right – crafts the advanced gear that other agents depend upon. Each Convention has a variety of Methodologies, and every Methodology has sub-departments to process specific duties, research, and innovations. (For details about individual Methodologies, see **The Book of Secrets**.)

Cross-Convention Imperatives

Many situations demand expertise from several different Conventions. Such cross-Convention *imperatives* allow operatives and supervisors to coordinate efforts for efficient solutions to a given crisis. Although specific amalgam teams serve most purposes, certain ongoing situations – notably the evolution of Information Technology among the Masses and (if it exists) the Rogue Council – require strategic initiatives to deal with the problems.

Amalgams

When operatives work together in an action team, the resulting *amalgam* combines personal expertise with top-down management. Essentially, a supervisor assigns lower-ranking operatives to an amalgam, issues orders to that amalgam, and supplies its agents with essential gear, data, clearance, support, and other resources. **(See *VDAS: The Datacrawl*, p. 182)** In return, the agents within a given amalgam fulfill their instructions and report back to their supervisor with regular status updates.

Every amalgam has a stated purpose. Field teams handle research, intel, dirty work, and other tasks among the Masses. Research amalgams pursue assigned projects, providing data for other teams. Construction, tech, repair, and innovation teams handle the grimy yet essential labor that keeps the Technocratic Union functioning. Specialist teams address specific duties – infiltration, extraction, cleanup, interrogation, and so forth – that demand elite attention from skilled personnel. For every imaginable purpose, the Union assigns an amalgam.

Agents within an amalgam must cooperate with one another. Renegade behavior endangers the team, its purpose, its supervisor, and the people who'd be affected if the mission were to fall through. A cleanup team, for instance, puts agents and innocents at risk if its integrity is compromised by inefficient behavior. Successful teams are rewarded, slack ones receive reprimands, and consistently unsuccessful ones are broken up and reassigned at the expense of the agents and the supervisor who coordinated them. Especially in the wake of the Dimensional Anomaly, there's no room for fuck-ups in the Technocratic Union. Whatever rivalries and failures a given faction or individual might suffer, an amalgam must be successful or it does not last.

Unenlightened Citizens/ Support Personnel

Because the Union has such grand ambitions and complex logistics, the number of willing, loyal, sentient bodies the organization requires easily exceeds its supply of Enlightened personnel. As one would expect, many jobs and roles don't actually require Enlightened Science. As a result, unenlightened personnel fill a wide range of mundane roles, working as technicians, security guards, soldiers, bureaucrats, janitors, and so on. The lowest-ranking citizens of the Union possess no Enlightenment at all (and thus, in game terms, don't have Arete or Enlightenment Traits). Each Convention has its own name for these people, whether they're the sympathizers of the New World Order or the proles of Iteration X. In general, though, the Union calls them *citizens*.

Because genetic engineering and cloning provide two of the Technocracy's most useful resources, several Conventions use manufactured, enhanced, or artificial citizens to fill these low-ranking roles. (See ***Unconventional Operatives***, below.) Some of these citizens seem rather impersonal – indistinct from one another and apparently devoid of individual personalities. An Iteration X Construct, for instance, might deploy a legion of identical, bald grunt soldiers with bar codes on their necks, whereas an NWO investigation team might send nondescript clones wearing black suits into the field to accompany Enlightened Black Suit Operatives.

Other artificial citizens have been tailored to have very specific appearances. The Progenitors employ FACADE Engineers who specialize in crafting specific clones, especially for missions to abduct an oblivious Sleeper and replace her with a Technocracy clone. For decades, stories persisted of rare robotic and artificial constructs working alongside Void Engineers; sadly, the vast majority of these citizens proved significantly less capable than ordinary humans. Despite the Technocracy's many advances in the field, all artificial citizens have flaws, and most are prone to the Paradox Effect, invariably dissolving or degrading over time.

The battle for reality has high stakes. So, although this practice has fallen out of favor, the Technocracy does occasionally authorize agents to abduct and recruit ordinary people into its ranks... either temporarily or permanently. The New World Order excels at reprogramming unenlightened citizens through Procedures euphemistically known as *Social Conditioning*. Through such sciences, an Operative can erase or replace memories, instill loyalty, and reconstruct identity. Sleepteaching devices install crude training and indoctrination, and the contents of a citizen's mind can be downloaded to computers for later analysis and use.

Such procedures work best with people who have very little willpower or resistance. Even then, reprogramming doesn't usually last for long unless it has been consistently reinforced with subtle incentives and rewards. If and when reprogramming fails, a kidnapped citizen might need to have his memory and personality permanently altered or erased – a risky procedure that tends to ruin a recruit's most valuable qualities. In extreme cases, the recruit himself might need to be cancelled... and such extreme actions create headaches even for the Technocracy. (The paperwork alone is a pain in the ass.) Whenever possible,

the Union prefers willing and loyal citizens to brainwashed or threatened abductees.

Fortunately, such extreme measures are seldom necessary. Throughout the industrialized world, willing citizens seek jobs within the Technocratic Union. Very few of these people know what the Union actually *is* or *does*, of course, but the promise of good pay, steady jobs, and fabulous opportunities provides a lure that few tech-inclined people – especially in these days of shaky economies and uncertain employment – can, or *want* to, resist.

Extraordinary Citizens and Initiated Operatives

A holdover from the Order of Reason, the word *initiate* is rarely, if ever, used in official terminology. Instead, each Convention has its own designation for citizens at the second Technocratic rank. These personnel have been assimilated into the Technocracy itself. They know what it is, they know what it does, and they know their place in it. Unlike lower-level citizens, these people recognize the Technocracy as a distinct entity, and they understand their duties and potential within that entity. And in that sense, they've been initiated into the greater mystery they serve.

Low-ranking Technocracy initiates fall into two categories:

- The **extraordinary citizens** who use advanced Devices, receive special training, and occasionally enjoy enhancements – cybernetics and biomods that go beyond the realms of Sleeper technology. **(See the Background: *Enhancements* in Chapter Six, pp. 312-313).** In certain circumstances, most notably among the Void Engineers, these citizens can achieve great rank and respect.

- The **Enlightened operatives** who enjoy the same benefits and training but who have also Awakened in the **Mage** sense. Such personnel can employ Enlightened Procedures (in other words, technomagick) that extraordinary citizens cannot. Many of these initiatory Procedures involve perception and analysis. Such operatives can *see* the supernatural, but they can barely affect it with anything other than mundane training and technology. (In game terms, these operatives have an Enlightenment Trait of 1 or 2.) Status-wise, these operatives often rank slightly better than even the most esteemed extraordinary citizens. Enlightenment, after all, is the defining trait of excellence.

The CACS

The global expansion of IT culture has unlocked a new Pandora's Box of horrors: extradimensional incursions through careless computer use. Magickal rites, after all, often depend upon complex mathematics and geometry. Up until the computer age, such sophisticated mathematics remained beyond the reach of all but the most brilliant sorcerers. These days, though, any idiot with a computer could open the gates to certain extradimensional realms with his home computer. It's *rare*, but it happens. And so, a new corps of cross-Convention technicians – the *Computational Anomaly Corrections Specialists* (CACS) – monitors potentially dangerous computer use, particularly among the Masses.

Given the billions of people with computers these days, the "Cacks" have an essentially infinite job. No group could possibly cover the entire beat. Still, CACS operatives – drawn primarily from young members of Iteration X, the Void Engineers, and the NWO – maintain scanning programs and sift global data for particularly dangerous keywords and operations. On a mundane level, these Technocrats scope out cyberterrorists and then send in strike crews to sweep-'n'-sack their operations. When computational anomalies indicate cross-dimensional portals, demonic summoning, or other paranormal computer hazards, CACS counters the operations with holistically immersed agents, sends in physical operatives to get the offending computer (and user) offline, or – quite often – both. Thus, while Homeland Security agents charge in to confiscate or destroy a potentially dangerous computer operation, online Specialists tackle the problem from within the Digital Web.

Most Virtual Adepts know how to avoid tripping a Cacks trace. That's basic training among today's VAs. Sleepers, though, might find heavily armed agents at their front door, sudden virus warnings shutting down their computers, or weird viruses or equipment failures giving them the *Blue Screen of Death* treatment. So if you suffer an unexpected malfunction or Distributed Denial of Service attack, it might not be a bad thing. Perhaps the vigilant Cacks just prevented you from opening up a doorway to cosmic horror or forestalled an incursion from a hypermath dimension you'd never even dreamed of...

Panopticon

Also known as *the* Panopticon, Panopticon comes together during early 2002 in the wake of the Rogue Council and increasing anti-Technocracy violence across the globe. Security, espionage, infiltration, data consolidation, counterterrorism, and occasional acts of reven... excuse us, *retribution*... are the chief purposes behind this group, whose existence is optional within a given **Mage** chronicle. Unlike most imperatives, Panopticon has its own internal rank structure that supersedes the usual Convention/ Methodology structure. The group employs the dreaded ***HIT Mark*** cybernetic killing machines (see **Appendix I**) that have fallen largely out of favor in the 21st century Union and often displays an impatient disregard for other, more official considerations within the Union. Essentially, Panopticon is a Methodology in its own right, answering to a command cell that remains Classified even by the Technocracy's usual standards of secrecy. And though other Technocrats appear to be shifting toward a less militant attitude, Panopticon ops are hardcore Ascension Warriors.

Centuries ago, in the Order of Reason, these visionaries were considered part of the Outer Circle of their secret society. Many of them didn't believe that they practiced Enlightened Science at all, and the thought of performing what a mage would call "vulgar magick" seemed downright impossible. Such people were just incredibly talented, achieving results with technology that went beyond what ordinary people could achieve. In the modern In today's Technocracy, however, modern-day initiates know that they use Enlightened Science. Theoretically, they can use blatant Procedures too, but they're strongly discouraged from doing so. Like their historical counterparts, the vast majority of these initiates are more proficient at using technology than the average unenlightened citizen among the Masses, but they're not yet proficient enough to bend the laws of reality with it.

Oldlife and Newlife

If and when a Technocrat passes from the support personnel stage into a deeper level of understanding and responsibility, the Technocracy divides that agent's life into two distinct phases:

- The **oldlife** – a state of ignorant bliss that a person moves through among the Masses before she's initiated into the greater reality of the Technocracy and its affairs; and...
- The **newlife** – the initiated stage wherein the Technocrat learns about her place in that greater reality.

Traditionally, an agent leaves behind her oldlife when she achieves initiation. The risks and responsibilities of that Technocratic mission turn her oldlife into an inconvenient liability. With a few exceptions (usually among the Syndicate Convention, where those old ties often aid the social element of their missions), an initiated Technocrat disappears from her oldlife, receiving a fresh identity, home, resources, and community within the Technocratic Union. From that point onward, she stops being the person she once was and starts being a part of a bigger plan.

Like boot camp, the early stages of newlife tend to be harsh, Spartan, and dehumanizing. This barracks phase removes the initiate to a Construct far away from her previous home, bunks her with other initiates, and puts her under a strictly managed regimen of training, study, and indoctrination. In time, she earns duties and privileges within the barracks; if she misbehaves or fails in her duties, those benefits are suspended or revoked.

Gradually, an accomplished Technocrat graduates from that phase into a broader, more individual life. Certain Technocrats, of course, prefer the comfort of that simple existence and choose to remain within the barracks phase. Others – too unpredictable or incompetent to move forward on schedule – remain at that beginning stage for a while. In time, however, such agents become a liability. Unless she remains a barracks bum by choice, an agent who seems stuck in the early phase of newlife gets sent on suicide missions, relegated to simple tasks, reprogrammed into a walking husk, or simply terminated.

If and when she proves herself worthy of advancement, the agent receives perks of that expanded newlife: money, status, and increased responsibilities combined with greater freedom of expression. In certain cases (especially among the NWO, Progenitors, and Syndicate), she might receive a new home, persona, and social network outside the Technocracy itself. Although she's monitored by her superiors (for obvious reasons), she can begin to build something like a normal life; if she screws up, however, that newlife and its perks can be withheld, removed, or even – in extreme cases – destroyed. This all presents a powerful carrot-and-stick motivation for loyalty

Technocratic Dissidents

The harsh methods that the Union occasionally employs, and the potential corruption within the Technocracy itself, have inspired a number of dissident initiatives within the Union. These small but determined networks of Technocratic idealists wage a covert and exceedingly dangerous shadow war in order to save the Technocracy from itself. Although the mortality rate is hellishly high and the penalties of exposure are nightmarish even by the standards of ***Room 101*** **(see that sidebar, p. 182)**, these devoted operatives have not yet given up on the Technocracy's salvation.

- **The Cassandra Complex:** An informational network that prefers to be called the *Strategic Prognostications and Data Dispersal Unit*, the Cassandra Complex compiles helpful data and observations, then disperses that information to the other underground groups.
- **The Harbingers of Avalon:** Once a small group dedicated to the ideals of Camelot, the Harbingers have grown into a sizable contingent despite the hideous fates inflicted upon all but one of the group's original members. These days, the group is a half-step away from leaving the Technocracy and reforming under a new name: *Navalon*. **(See *Potential Recruits* in the *Disparate Alliance* section, on p. 200)**
- **The Friends of Courage:** Named for the renegade hero of many idealistic Technocrats, the Friends of Courage remain as secretive as they were almost 20 years ago, when Secret Agent John Courage first noted corruption within the Inner Circle. Unlike their flamboyant inspiration, these agents act carefully. Many members have been converted or cancelled over the years, but the Friends remain a potent force of internal dissent.
- **Project Invictus:** The most notorious covert sect within the Technocracy, Invictus has waged a surgically accurate crusade for over a decade. Unlike the other groups, it's both militant enough to strike directly at its targets and yet dedicated enough to stay with the Technocracy until the bitter end.

(For greater details about these groups, see **The Book of Secrets**.)

and achievement. Serve the Union, and you prosper; harm it, and you harm yourself.

Agents or Operatives

The general terms *agent* and *operative* describe the most versatile type of Technocrat. For the most part, those terms remain interchangeable. An agent or operative works as a soldier, scientist, explorer, facilitator, or visionary for the Union. Again, each Convention has its own language for describing these individuals; the Progenitors, for example, depend upon an array of Students who work in laboratories, attend classes, collaborate with agents from other Conventions, and eventually defend a thesis before they can be promoted. (In game terms, an agent-level Technocrat typically has an Enlightenment Trait of 3 to 5.)

After the barracks stage of their newlives, most agents spend the majority of their time in what we would call the real world. Because the Earthly realm has been infested with paranormal activity, Earth-space is also referred to as the *Front Lines*. At the height of the Ascension War, it's one big battlefield, where teams of agents work together to investigate, recruit, abduct, or eliminate rival mages and other Reality Deviants. Earthbound agents have also been entrusted with Procedures and Devices that allow them to generate revenue, create innovations, modify technologies, adjust probabilities, destroy enemies, and transform reality (as the Masses understand it).

Each team of agents is assigned to one or more *fronts:* mundane-appearing bases that the Technocracy uses as factories, strongholds, workshops, business ventures, and other centers of operation. The most useful fronts – and therefore the most heavily defended ones – contain the Nodes that serve as sources of Quintessence. Successful agents are authorized to use the resources from those fronts, and successful teams get to use specially prepared laboratories and research facilities (where the chances of the Paradox Effect have been reduced), surveillance equipment, Social Conditioning equipment, and of course, backup assistance from initiates and citizens. *Very* successful Technocrats enjoy one of the most valuable rewards an agent can receive: free time and a life outside the Union. This potent incentive gives Technocratic operatives a serious boost to morale and motivation.

Supervisors and Amalgams

Someone needs to manage teams of agents. That's what supervisors do. Every team of agents reports to one (or, in some cases, more than one) assigned supervisor. That supervisor provides the team with missions and logistics support and then evaluates its failure or success. (In game terms, a supervisor has an Enlightenment Trait of 4 to 6.)

If an amalgam of agents represents several different Conventions, the amalgam might need to carry out different types of missions for different supervisors. In the most dangerous missions, a supervisor deploys a team of agents to investigate another supervisor, front, Construct, or amalgam. It's vital, after all, to assure compliance and efficiency among other groups, so paranoia, rivalries, and politics invariably affect each supervisor's career.

Lower-level supervisors answer to their higher-echelon bosses. During the 20th century, these upper-level supervisors watched the Ascension War from the Horizon, evaluating the success or failure of Technocratic missions across large geographic areas. During the 21st century, however, that lofty element has largely been replaced by Earthbound supervision instead. (For details, see the ***Horizon Constructs*** sidebar.) Even on Earth, however, senior supervisors work far from the Front Lines, often in luxuriously appointed headquarters in the cities, oceans, wilderness, or deep underground. Telepresence gear facilitates constant communication, and occasional visits from the top office keep subordinates on their toes.

The Schism

Generally, this split-perspective approach provides a smooth chain of command between the higher and lower supervisory ranks. Even so, the division produces problems too. One of the Union's biggest internal problems within the last half-century involves a division between the idealistic theories developed by remote supervisors, and the practical needs of operatives and supervisors on the Front Lines. This disparity – sometimes referred to as *the Schism* – causes many of the moral and ethical challenges that agents and supervisors must face.

Essentially, the Schism comes down to the difference between abstract theories and messy realities. A Front Line supervisor recognizes the necessity of compromise (say, an alliance with an influential pack of vampires), whereas the distant perfectionist tolerates no such thing. The breakdown between those perspectives fuels rivalry, intrigue, and occasional hostilities. When you live in an engineered, perfect world, it's really easy to lose track of ethical shades of gray and to demand things that cannot – or *should* not – be done by your underlings back home. Worse still, that disconnection between the Front Lines and Horizon Constructs bred secrets... secrets which, in turn, nurtured the Technocracy's moral and metaphysical corruption. Just as the Traditions suffered a breakdown between the lofty ideals and ancient grudges of their Masters, so too does the Technocracy suffer from the Schism between abstract ideals and human realities.

Symposiums

In any given city (or other large geographic area), several of the most successful supervisors form a council to oversee their operations on a large scale. The Union calls this alliance a *Symposium;* within that Symposium, each of the five Conventions has at least one representative. Supervisors move teams and resources around through a Symposium's designated territory, like pieces on a chessboard. Some supervisors go along personally to oversee their teams on the Front Lines; others watch their teams through remote surveillance; still others delegate authority through lower-ranking supervisors or high-ranking operatives.

Symposium meetings are formal affairs, accompanied by lively debate, heavy security, and intricate status reports. In moments of great triumph, crisis, tragedy, or failure, agents and amalgams get called in to report their activities to a Symposium... and possibly to receive appropriate rewards, reassignments, or punishments

Horizon Constructs

For much of the last two centuries, upper-echelon Technocrats have tended to live full time in *Horizon Constructs*: Technocracy bases stationed in geosynchronous orbit over the Earth, just outside the barrier of Earth's Horizon. Essentially space stations, these colonies provide self-contained reality bubbles, far from the risks and contaminations of an imperfect world. Heavily defended and technologically superior to anything found on Earth, the Horizon Constructs provide secure barracks for low-ranking initiates, safe workspace for higher-level operatives, and dedicated offices for the higher-ranking supervisors, managers, and Inner Circle.

All Technocratic ranks have a place within a Horizon Construct. Extraordinary citizens work the menial jobs, and freshly initiated personnel tend to enter their newlives away from the material world's distracting and often dangerous environment. Successful agents travel to Horizon Constructs to use research facilities in Paradox-free environments, whereas unsuccessful ones get taken there for punishment, reprogramming, indoctrination, or repurposing. Supervisors and Managers prefer the focus and seclusion of Colony life; certain allied beings and enhanced operatives can't exist in for long Earthly space, so they must live in Horizon Constructs until the day when the Union achieves total domination of Earthly reality.

In the Avatar Storm metaplot, most Horizon Constructs are damaged, destroyed, or mysteriously lost. The Void Engineers experience the highest losses, but every Convention is affected. The **Revised Edition Convention Books** follow this post-catastrophic Technocracy, which might or might not have come to pass in your chronicle. (See the Future Fates sidebar ***The Dimensional Anomaly and a "Kinder, Gentler Technocracy."***) If the Horizon Constructs remain operational, Dimensional Science technologies still provide relatively safe and reliable access to the Colonies, although large loads and groups travel to and from these Constructs through Technocratic space shuttles. These missions depart from covert airstrips across the world, giving rise to UFO rumors and other classified travel methods.

Because space stations became part of consensual reality roughly a half-century ago, these Horizon Constructs are considered coincidental as far as magick is concerned. And because very few Sleepers ever get near such places (astronauts, after all, are extraordinary citizens), the Technocracy's reality is the only one that matters in a Horizon Construct.

as a result of those activities. For the most part, Symposiums are Earthbound affairs. The logistics and hazards involved with Horizon Construct meetings limit these meetings to secure office buildings and military bases unless some extraordinary threat forces them to relocate to a more remote location.

Masters, Managers, and Extradimensional Realms

Beyond the Horizon Constructs, the Technocracy has absolute dominion over other, more exotic realms – domains where reality has been completely reformed according to the ideals of the masters who control it. Such *extradimensional realms* can be legendary or infamous, depending on their purposes. Iteration X devotees speak reverently of Autocthonia, a Realm completely remade into an ideal of mechanical perfection. Void Engineers know of many extradimensional destinations – including the Darkside Moonbase on the far side of the moon and the magnificent Copernicus Research Station – as well as other fortresses used to monitor and observe extradimensional races and entities.

Among these alien landscapes and their related Horizon Constructs, Technocratic Managers assert a level of control uncommon in the more mundane and limited reality of Earth. Although plenty of operatives attain a Master-level degree of Enlightenment (in game terms, Enlightenment Traits of 5 to 8), the acknowledged masters of the Technocratic Union usually prefer to escape worldly imperfections and travel to realms that better suit their ideals.

One Convention provides an exception to this rule: the Syndicate. Although the high masters of Iteration X, the Progenitors, and the New World Order escape the annoying boundaries of Earth whenever possible and the Void Engineers avoid them as a matter of principle, the Syndicate favors an earthier sort of reality: the sumptuous privilege of extreme wealth. Granted, the vast estates, penthouse suites, and exclusive retreats that such Technocrats enjoy bear little resemblance to reality as most human beings experience it. Those territories, though, are very much a part of the Earthly plane – purchased with unimaginable wealth and protected by advanced technologies, of course, but still a part of the material world. Syndicate Managers like to say that their connection to Earth protects their Convention from the distancing effects of the Schism; other Technocrats suspect (very quietly) that these masters are just as disconnected – perhaps even *more* disconnected – from the human condition as the masters who've gone off in search of extraplanetary ideals.

Disconnected or not, some Managers are remarkably hands-on in their day to day activities. A Void Engineer Manager on an Umbral Moonbase, for instance, might prefer to act like the captain of a science fiction starship chasing down extradimensional horrors instead of hiding out in his fortified control room. A different Manager might travel to a Horizon Construct, accompanied by a supervisor and one or more teams of agents, to oversee technicians who specialize in highly advanced equipment. Other Technocratic masters employ holographic technology and virtual telepresence (in game terms, Correspondence and Mind Procedures) to visit places from afar, monitoring their agents from a safe but perceptive distance.

Some Managers choose to remain on Earth or travel back to it in order to conduct extremely important missions. The

mysterious Secret Agent John Courage is generally considered a Master-level operative, yet he can be found anywhere that danger calls. When several high-level Technocrats work together as part of the same amalgam – like the famous Special Response Team Alpha – they intervene personally in some of Earth's most dangerous crises. Such extreme measures, however, remain rare. Master-level expertise allows for greater acts of Enlightened Science... which, in turn, carry greater risks of Paradox. Master-level intervention might cause bigger problems than the ones the team was originally sent in to solve... and so, though such missions occur from time to time, they're not undertaken lightly.

Old Masters: The Inner Circle of Great Old Men

The Technocracy's highest-ranking entities are the legendary *Old Masters*: humans so far removed from Earthly reality that they contemplate the highest mysteries of Enlightenment. The Order of Reason knew them as *Honori*, and because techniques of life extension are easier to accomplish beyond the Horizon, some of the Old Masters are many centuries old. In the echelons of the elite, they debate concepts like the Time Table, cosmic enigmas, and the ultimate role of Reality Deviants in the greater scheme of things. Untroubled by Paradox, these "great old men" (all but one of whom are indeed male) regard the innovative creations of lesser Enlightened folk, dreaming of how their Inner Circle might reshape the future of the human race.

Plagued by human limitations, these great old men also chase after rarefied goals like immortality, omnipresence within lesser realms, the creation of new Horizon Realms, and the mentoring of the next generation of Old Masters. Mere agents never speak directly with this Enlightened inner sanctum; instead, the Old Masters appoint or create factotums and representatives to deal with lesser concerns. These entities – artificial intelligences, holographic personalities, shadowy groups, or inhumanly capable operatives – speak and act on behalf of the Old Masters. To the average Technocrat, such entities are legends... often rumored, rarely seen, and almost inevitably feared.

(Obviously, the continuing influence of these Old Masters depends upon a world in which the Dimensional Anomaly never happened. In the Reckoning metaplot, these august Technocrats were apparently severed from their Earthly connections, and the Union reorganized itself in the early years of the new millennium. The Old Masters might still send messages from time to time or otherwise manifest their will back on Earth. For the most part, though, the Front Lines are the *only* lines in a post-Anomaly setting. Although the current leadership still suffers a bit of disconnect from the realities of those Front Lines, the new leaders are far more aware of Earthly realities than the ones who'd been living off world for decades or centuries.)

Control

The most legendary representative is an adaptable entity known as *Control*: a being whose identity and power can be instantly verified by anyone with enough Enlightenment to see it for what it is. Control rarely intervenes. Control does not constrain itself to one appearance, although it usually manifests as a man dressed in white. Control sometimes appears in several different bodies rather than one, and it almost always refers to itself as a collective *we* rather than an individual *I*.

Control does not need to fight, command, or engage itself with rivals; Control has agents for that sort of thing. And although Control appears to be physical, rumors claim that it's a remote projection of distant consciousness. On many levels, Control is as close to a god as most Technocrats ever get – a collective and active manifestation of the Old Masters' will. Although Control is clearly a product of technology (any other option would be too ridiculous to contemplate), the science that allows it to exist transcends anything currently known by even the most accomplished operatives.

What, really, *is* Control? Is the entity some manifestation of the concept of Technocratic domination? A hyperpowerful hologram? A psychic entity forged by the Enlightened wills of the Inner Circle? Maybe this is the Technocratic Master Oracle, a being who personifies the All-Seeing Eye and the ultimate wisdom of the Union's cause. Some rumors even claim it's the ghost of all the Old Masters who've passed on, bound by their philosophy into a single entity... but that idea, of course, is absurd. Control is simply Control. Further analysis is restricted to the Technocracy's highest ranks.

For most Technocratic agents, the existence of such ranks is theoretical. It's hard enough to survive day to day and carry out the necessary orders of one's immediate supervisor without troubling one's head thinking about the eye at the top of the pyramid. It's a rare thing indeed for anyone below the supervisor rank to encounter a master or Control, and it's almost impossible to actually meet one of the great old men. The Schism prevents most Earthbound Technocrats from dealing with the Horizon-based ones on anything other than a need-to-know basis, and it prevents the so-called Union from truly coming together as it might have done otherwise. And if those rumors about Nephandic corruption are true, those distant and secretive Old Masters might provide the key to the cage that either imprisons the best promises of the Technocratic Union or else keeps something even worse in check... for now.

(The **Revised Convention Books** declare that Control has been cut off from the Earthly Technocracy. Whether or not that is true depends on the wishes of an individual Storyteller. If Control *does* manifest, of course, it could be any number of things: a manifestation of the real Control, an impostor, a *Sending* (see Appendix I, p. 641), an agent of ***Threat Null*** (see above), a Nephandic ploy, or whatever other agency of rule or misrule the Storyteller wants it to become.)

Unlike the free-spirited Traditions, the Technocratic Union depends upon this designated chain of command. Reliable precision is essential to the survival and prosperity of the Union. Even in the more individualized spirit of the 21st century, the Union is a collective society whose existence demands obedience and cooperation. Although certain degrees of eccentricity and personal initiative have been built into the system (see ***The Six Degrees***, below), continual carelessness, sloppiness, and insubordination cannot be tolerated. Flawed pieces within the system must either be corrected (via Processing) or discarded. In all ways that matter, the Union trumps the individual. The future of humanity deserves no less.

Unconventional Operatives

(For more details, see the **Background: *Enhancement*** in **Chapter Six**; ***Extraordinary Operatives and Technocratic Creations*** in **Appendix I**; and ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**.)

As Reality Deviants and other critics have pointed out, the Technocracy employs extrahuman personnel. Although the extent of those unconventional operatives has been grossly exaggerated by the critics (or so the Inner Circle insists...), anyone who's seen the Union's true face knows that its features can seem a bit mechanical at times.

Despite xenophobic hysteria, all loyal Technocrats recognize that the use of cyborgs, clones, and biomodified organisms is simply good policy. The human organism, after all, remains subject to all manner of embarrassing and fatal malfunctions. Technology improves upon nature, and the Technocracy personnel are no exception to that rule. True, the disputes between enhanced operatives and "naturals" occasionally flare into open conflicts and covert sabotage. Such behavior, though, is not in the Union's best interests, so those conflicts are often dealt with harshly. Just as European males within the Order of Reason learned to accommodate female visionaries and people from assorted cultures, so too must the self-labeled naturals and the so-called constructs learn to deal peacefully with one another.

Technically, discrimination within the ranks is a non-problem: it *cannot* exist, therefore it *does not* exist. Even so, the divisions between Adamites and superiors remain a thorn in the Technocratic armor – not a crippling problem, but one that continues to irritate and hinder the full potential of the Union. The most obvious parties in those conflicts include...

Adamites

In the eyes of certain natural-born and unenhanced *homo sapiens*, the various constructs and modified personnel are useful but ultimately inferior. Favoring names like "Adamites," "naturals.," or "human-firsters," these Technocrats cast a wary eye on their unnatural compatriots.

Like other subcultures within the Union (see ***Technocratic Dissidents***), the Adamites don't hang up flags to advertise their agendas. Instead, they employ a covert set of cues by which they recognize one another and use subtle forms of discouragement and one-upmanship to keep the freaks in their place. Unconventional operatives are rarely harassed – that sort of thing is an invitation to punishment, censure, and a late-night beatdown from an annoyed cyborg or two. No, the freaks get lousy assignments, endure subtle pranks, and find themselves lacking for essential services or gear when an Adamite finds a chance to make their lives difficult. Meanwhile, naturals get preferential treatment, attract like-minded friends, and somehow find themselves advancing through the ranks faster and more easily than a cybernetic comrade would. Adamites sometimes advertise their allegiance by eating apples in a conspicuous way or keeping bowls of fruit (always with some apples) close at hand. Most often, though, they simply play their prejudices close to their chests and appear perfectly tolerant of the misfits in their midst.

Victors, Clones, and Biojocks

At the other extreme of the biomass equation, the Technocracy's advanced organic beings tend to view themselves at one of two extremes: either they consider themselves freakish toys brewed up in some Progenitor lab or they embrace the tag *homo superior* and aren't shy about letting their flawed human counterparts forget it.

Thanks to the Progenitor Convention, the Technocracy's filled with biologically enhanced personnel. Most appear to be more or less human, although they tend to boast an inhuman level of physical perfection. Given the Photoshopped glamor of modern advertising (not to mention the miracles of plastic surgery), such perfection isn't as noticeable as it once was. These days, a *homo superior* Victor looks like he or she just stepped off a magazine cover... probably an issue of Muscle & Fitness, true enough, but still within the bounds of acceptability. Not long ago, it was easy to tell a Progenitor construct from an unenhanced agent. Now, the genegineering and biomods are far more difficult to spot unless something went wrong during the procedure. Granted, the clones, Victors, and biojocks tend to be a lot stronger than normal people, and they're often a bit unstable too. Still, the obvious improvements on the human machine are too valuable to dismiss, and so the various bioenhanced operatives retain a valued place in the Technocratic ranks.

The most obvious organic constructs belong to the infamous Black Suit agencies. Although such operatives remain inferior to fully Enlightened agents, the NWO beefs up its street-level ranks with unique clones who possess the training and abilities of a typical Black Suit operative. Reputedly cloned from a handful of distinguished operatives, these agents possess paranormal abilities dedicated to the cause of order and control. And although they've been known to get rather enthusiastic in the performance of their duties, certain excesses are understandable, given the hazardous yet necessary duties such agents pursue.

Other bioconstructs and biomodified personnel typically conceal their augmented nature more thoroughly. A handful of them manifest unfortunate genetic or organic flaws, but such are the costs of progress. Most of these regrettable casualties of biological imperfection remain in secluded Constructs and laboratories, tending to internal duties until their unusual skills are required in the field. Despite propaganda to the contrary, the mythic bat-winged Chihuahua is not typical of such constructs. Although young Progenitors will have their little jokes, most bioconstructed and biomodified personnel are perfectly designed, if not altogether natural.

Exos and Steelskins

Cybernetic enhancements are common tools among the Technocratic ranks. Many have been carefully concealed, obvious only when in use. Others are more... noticeable. The unkind labels *exos* and *steelskins* have been applied to cybernetically enhanced operatives whose modifications evoke disturbed and perhaps envious reactions from their fellow Technocrats.

21st-century cyborgs tend to be far less obvious than their older counterparts. The classic HIT Marks seem positively quaint, although they possess a definite intimidation factor. These days,

nanotech replaces clunky metal gear, especially among the newer generations of cyborgs and HIT Marks. Still, obvious cybertech *does* have a certain retro cool-factor, and certain jobs still require a half-metal dude who can bust through walls. For the dudes (and ladies) in question, that role can be a fairly mixed bag.

Of all Union personnel, it's the cyborgs who present the most archetypal form of Technocratic power. (The Men in Black come in a close second.) Embodying the fusion of flesh, mind, and machine, these agents can be unenlightened Ciphers or Enlightened operatives. Iteration X is most (in)famous for its cybernetic personnel; most Iterators have some degree of modification, if only because of the Convention's ideal of transcending fleshly limitations. All Conventions, though, have a few cybernetic agents among their ranks – most of them simply aren't as obvious or extensive as the Iteration X operatives.

The Progenitors, Iteration X, and the Void Engineers also employ cybernetically enhanced animals and clones, typically for hardcore field duty way beyond the gaze of the Masses. Although such beings are extremely vulgar in the eyes of the Consensus, extreme situations call for extreme measures. Cybernetic beasts – like the infamous cyber-tooth tiger – get dispatched to extradimensional hot zones, where the Paradox Effect holds very little influence and the uncanny nature of the terrain and its inhabitants necessitate such durable and efficient operatives.

Robots

Although independent robot technology is not as successful within the Technocracy as science-fiction films would have us believe, there *are* numerous robotic and even android agents and assistants within the Union's ranks. Most of them are battlefield models, exploration devices, or lab-assistant units whose limited intellect allows them to perform grunt labor without becoming a burden on their organic peers. For the most part, these entities remain restricted to Constructs and extradimensional facilities. Even in a world raised on *Star Wars*, there's only so much complexity a robot can display within the Consensus before chronic malfunctions limit its efficiency.

That said, simple robots – drones, lab units, intelligent vehicles, and so forth – function perfectly well among the Masses. The success of hunter-killer drones deployed by military and police forces has brought such robots fully into Consensus reality. For obvious reasons, the Masses hold that kind of technology in wary awe; it's pretty cool, yet ominous. There's a big difference between *watching* sci-fi action movies and being on the receiving end of one yourself. And so, although they're significantly more advanced than they might appear, these robotic operatives play dumb among the Masses, acting more like charming mechanical pets than like viable rivals for humanity. An enemy's underestimation, after all, is a very potent weapon.

Regardless of their rivalries, every Technocratic operative is expected to play nice with the others. Bigotry and favoritism are not, under official policy, tolerated within the Union's ranks. People being people (even if those people seem rather unusual), certain prejudices exist. Especially in the 21st century, however – when operatives of all ethnicities and gender configurations fill the Technocratic ranks – the core principle of *mutuality* is vital to this group's survival.

Mutuality and Unmutuality

Mutuality is such a vital principle within the Technocracy's operations that the words *mutual* and *unmutual* carry strong connotations for Union personnel. Drawn from the Latin root meaning "to reciprocate" (and related to the word *mutate*, meaning "to change"), mutuality suggests investment and exchange between parties. You give me something, I give you something, and we're mutual; if I give you something and you take something away from me, then you're being unmutual.

Technocracy justice – formal and otherwise – depends upon the principle that the Union gives great things to its agents and expects great things from them in return. Selfishness is unmutual. Disloyalty is unmutual. Rebellion is unmutual. And because the Technocracy bestows such magnificent things upon its agents and depends so much upon their loyalty, judgment is swift and punishment harsh when an agent or team acts in an unmutual way. A well-intentioned failure is acceptable. Deliberately spitting in the Union's face is not.

The Six Degrees

As all Technocrats know from indoctrination onward, the Union holds a spectrum that features six degrees of tolerable loyalty. At one end, an operative is unimpeachably loyal; at the other, she's marked for cancellation. Punishments can move an agent further down the scale, whereas loyal and successful service moves her up toward the favorable end.

- **Degree 1 – Total Loyalty:** The operative is considered a bastion of Technocratic honor, viewed with great respect, and granted an enviable amount of freedom. So long as the agent doesn't abuse this trust, she's as trusted as a person can be within the Union.
- **Degree 2 – Assured Loyalty:** The agent has performed admirably, and her superiors have no reasonable suspicions regarding her devotion to the cause. She'll still be supervised, of course, but until and unless the agent behaves in some questionable manner, she enjoys an overall independence within Technocratic constraints.
- **Degree 3 – Assumed Loyalty:** The operative has yet to give her superiors a reason to doubt her loyalty. She'll be monitored and evaluated, of course, but at this default level of trust she's presumed to be trustworthy until she proves otherwise.
- **Degree 4 – Questionable Loyalty:** The agent's behavior, judgment, and/or activities have given her supervisors a reason to question her commitment to the cause. Monitoring increases and tighter restrictions are placed upon the operative until her behavior improves.
- **Degree 5 – Doubtful Loyalty:** Sloppy judgment and dubious behavior have put the agent on "the red

list." She'll be watched very carefully and made aware that her slope is getting quite slippery indeed. Social Conditioning might be in order, and whatever liberties she's had have been curtailed.

- **Degree 6 – Disloyalty:** The operative is considered a failure. Essentially, she's one screw-up away from a trip to Room 101, the spare-parts room, a suicide mission, or the grave.

- **Degree 7:** There *is* no Degree 7. It's a euphemism for cancellation.

Failure to Comply

Despite its draconian reputation, the Technocracy does not turn agents into dog food for any perceived infraction. Such measures are, if nothing else, profound wastes of training, investment, and potential. Still, rules are rules, and when rules are broken – as they inevitably will be – an escalating series of punishments must be invoked.

Minor infractions warrant the following measures: *Reprimand* (dressing-down by one's superior), *Report* (an official complaint against the operative), *Restriction* (loss of freedoms and privileges), and *Surveillance* (monitoring of that agent's activities). Serious infractions – or a consistent pattern of smaller ones – get punished by more diligent Surveillance, *Forfeiture* (loss of gear, perks, or more), *Demotion* (loss of rank and status), *Amended Society* (a rearranging of that agent's personal life, courtesy of his supervisors), *Reassignment* (transfer), *Extradimensional Reassignment* (transfer to a new and deadly extradimensional post), *Reprogramming/ Social Conditioning* (intense brainwashing; see this book's ***Prelude*** for residual effects), *Duplication* (replacement of that agent with a functional clone), and, finally, the *Degree Absolute* (a.k.a. *Cancellation*).

Again, severe measures are not used without careful consideration. Every supervisor is responsible for the conduct and status of the agents under her command, and if she uses punishments too freely – or, in contrast, if her agents are not governed strictly *enough* – things will go poorly for that supervisor.

Room 101

A generic name for the most dreaded corner of a Technocratic stronghold, Room 101 (a.k.a., *the White Room, the Black Room,* or, most ominously, *the Red Room*) is a secured chamber used for interrogations, Social Conditioning Procedures, or outright torture. Soundproofed and safeguarded against most forms of magick or transmission, a Room 101 facility features powerful restraints; monitoring and recording devices; and a handful of specially trained and very efficient operatives who know how to get the desired results and can break almost anyone with combinations of physical distress, psychological manipulation, Enlightened Procedures, and gross bodily harm.

For details about ***Social Processing and Reprogramming***, see the section of that name in **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 605-606)**.

Rewards of Service

A glance at the ***Backgrounds*** section of **Chapter Six** reveals just how rewarding service to the Technocracy can be. Certain Backgrounds are available *only* to members in good standing, with benefits like outsourcing and requisitions that come from Technocratic membership. Certain Ability Traits, too, are part of Technocratic training programs, and the Union has plenty of cool toys to play with as well. For dedicated operatives, Union membership provides a deep well of potential benefits. Just remember: what can be given can be taken away if the recipient seems ungrateful...

VDAS: The Datacrawl

Officially known as the **Visual Data & Analysis Spectrum** (**VDAS**), the "datacrawl" keeps Technocracy field agents apprised of vital information. Thanks to the VDAS (pronounced *vee-DAS*), an appropriately equipped or cybernetically enhanced operative can usually access intel about her companions or surroundings. Upon command, a flow of relevant data – targeting; positioning; vital statistics for people, substances, or creatures; and so forth – scrolls along the edges of the agent's peripheral vision, usually on the edges of her glasses or viewscreen. A subvocalized command (or, in cybernetic implants, a mental impulse) can request information about a given subject; otherwise, the VDAS scans whatever is positioned in the agent's field of vision. Because this datacrawl can be distracting or might provide compromising information, the agent can turn it on or off with a particular type of blink or – in the case of a cybernetically installed VDAS – with a mental shrug.

Datacrawl intel comes from the Technocracy's monitoring technology. If there's no information about a given subject in the Union's database, the VDAS can't pull up the information. In the 21st century, however, many people in industrialized areas have their vital statistics – height, weight, birth date, etc. – within readily available databases... and, by extension, within reach of the Technocracy's datacrawl. VDAS data gets displayed in metric terms for maximum efficiency. An example of a VDAS in action appears in this book's **Prelude**, when John Courage scans Lee Ann Milner. Naturally, the VDAS registers the information that's being scanned, the agent who's scanning it, and the subjects in the agent's view during the scan. An agent who wants to keep her secrets, therefore, is very careful about where, when, and how often she uses the datacrawl.

For game-system details about the datacrawl, see ***The Toybox*** section in **Appendix II**.

Risks and Rewards

Just as there are punishments, there are rewards for loyal service. Every agent has potential, and if she plays her cards right,

she'll be set for life. The Technocracy isn't just some company that sets up its employees with paychecks and health insurance. It's the secret society that *owns* that company... and its competition... and the secret masters that set them against each other. The elite of humanity can change your life forever. You want money? You'll never think about it again, and your credit will be spotless. You want sex? If you don't mind the moral implications, the Progenitors could clone you a partner who can make every dream you ever had come true. You want power? You'll need to fight to keep it, but you'll still be better off than 99% of the human race. Cybernetics? Biomods? Gadgets that would make James Bond jealous? Huge guns? A private army? The Technocracy has them all. Loyal service earns royal treatment, and well-regarded Technocrats are the kings and queens of the Awakened world.

But if the carrot isn't enough for you, there's always the stick: no matter how bad you think failure can be, failing the Technocracy is far worse. Citizenship in the Union isn't like some job where you'll end up escorted to the parking lot when you fail, carrying your personal stuff in a cardboard box. If your supervisors decide to terminate you, you won't make it outside the building. You can run, and they will find you. And then they can strap you down to a medical table and scramble your brains until you don't have a choice. They can clone you and make an obedient little brainwashed agent... one who won't *quite* be you but will still be alive.

And even if you escape, it's not as though the Traditions have any reason to trust a rogue agent on the run. So if you're good, you won't just have all your dreams come true, you'll also get to keep your free will. If you rebel, though, that's another story – one where an idealist gets hunted down by the most extensive secret society in the world. Ironically enough, that's the other side of the looking glass, because it's a life that the greatest enemies of the Technocracy struggle to survive.

Enlightenment and Empowerment: The Collective and the Individual

Each individual in the Union has a choice: conformity or rebellion. A crisis of loyalty could occur during the events of a single mission; devotion might be tested throughout a long crusade for reality. An agent must serve the needs of his collective, but he must also pursue his own path to *Empowerment*: that state known to RDs as Ascension. For truly loyal agents, the two goals are one and the same. Any one of the *Precepts of Damian* can provide a path to Empowerment, even if it's an ideal that can't be achieved in one lifetime. For brilliant minds, the Enlightened Genius is an extension of identity and individuality, offering new frontiers, new risks, and new rewards.

For all that they would never use or accept that word, Enlightened Technocracy agents *are* mages. Driven by the same urges and awareness that guide their rivals, they see a bigger picture than the one the Masses understand. Their actions shift reality – in accordance with a master plan, yes, but with a sense of cosmic Dynamism that mere grunts simply don't possess. Although their Union employs different terminology and insists on a firm divide between magic and reason, there's still a lot of common ground between the Traditions and their longtime enemies.

Technocratic operatives meditate between missions. No matter how many indoctrination sessions or formal reviews they may endure, each agent must walk the Path to Empowerment – from innocence to omniscience – alone. Mystic mages learn magick from the moment of their Awakening with the guidance of an Avatar. An agent follows a similar Path, awakening to the possibilities of Enlightened Science from the moment of his Epiphany with the guidance of his Genius. For any agent who wants to retain his or her individuality, the concepts of *Epiphany* and *Genius* are essential. (And in game terms, the downtime between missions provides useful opportunities to explore these issues of individuality.)

Epiphany

An Enlightened Technocrat first realizes his or her ability in a moment of *Epiphany* – just as other mages do, seen through a lens of science and reason. It's a flash of Genius, a brilliant revelation in which the impossible suddenly becomes possible. Some Epiphanies are witnessed by Technocratic operatives before a particular Technocrat gets recruited; others remain hidden, shameful events that the Technocrat conceals from watchful eyes.

Some common Ephiphanies include:

- A scientific breakthrough in a laboratory or other controlled environment, in which the Enlightened person accomplishes some remarkable feat he's never achieved before.
- A vivid dream or vision of a future in which technologically improbable things become possible, with results that lead to Utopia or Dystopia.
- The discovery of a phenomenon that the Enlightened scientist had regarded, up until that moment, as strictly theoretical.
- The budding Void Engineer crosses a boundary between worlds or encounters something from another dimension.
- A future Progenitor gives life to something that would not normally thrive, heals an injury or illness that should be incurable, or alters himself in a way that defies conventional biology.
- A potential member of Iteration X creates a mechanical or virtual avatar that achieves measurable artificial intelligence.
- A future citizen of the New World Order achieves an impossible intellectual feat, a sudden revelation, or a burst of psychic activity.
- A promising recruit for the Syndicate manipulates, coerces, reshapes, exploits, or dominates another human being's intelligence or judgment, leading to unexpected profit.

- An investigator confronts some paranormal entity head-on for the first time and uses her intellect and ingenuity to defeat it.

Genius

Just as mages have Avatars, Technocrats employ the guidance of their Geniuses. Unlike the connotations of gods and magic inherent in the word "avatar," the word *genius* (from a root meaning "born" and "origin") holds impressions of rationality, intellect, talent, and achievement. (It also once meant "guardian spirit" and shares a link to *genie*, but no one talks about that in the Technocracy...) Simply put, the Genius is the best aspect of an Enlightened Technocrat – the essential excellence that makes him what he is.

Although Technocrats regard conformity as essential to survival, the appearance of Genius varies from operative to operative. In the case of weird mystical manifestations, folks just don't talk about them truthfully. Because Genius, like Avatar, is an intimate and personal matter, it's easy to lie about the appearance or personality of one's Genius. Even so, most Technocratic Geniuses appear to their hosts as embodiments of technology, science, rationality, or protection... and when they don't, the Technocrat in question typically interprets his genius in that light anyway. Yes, a Man in Black might view his Genius as a dragon; to him, however, that dragon is symbolic of power and majesty, perhaps a guardian of treasure (the world), not some mythic force of chaos.

Typical Technocratic Geniuses include:

- A virtual associate who communicates only through text messages, phone calls, emails, or online icons.
- An imaginary mentor who confronts the Technocrat in dreams and reveries, whether that's a historical figure, a Platonic ideal, or a mirror (or idealized) image of the Technocrat herself.
- A guardian who waits at the threshold to another dimension, reachable only through Dimensional Science.
- A shadowy and nondescript agent who appears before the Technocrat when no one else is around.
- A religious icon (an angel, prophet, avatar, or patron saint) that appears in dreams and visions even though the agent doesn't practice her religion openly.

In most cases, the Genius appears to a given operative in moments of solitude, meditation, or introspection. Disreputable Supervisors might attempt to infiltrate or construct artificial representations of these events, but such intrusive and deceptive measures are exceedingly difficult to pull off well and remain officially unsanctioned and extremely unmutual.

Technocratic Faith

Officially, the Technocracy acknowledges rational science as its only god. That's not to say, however, that all Technocrats are atheists. For the most part, religion is considered a private matter by the Union unless and until it becomes a disruptive influence. The original Order of Reason, after all, was deeply rooted in sacred inspiration, and although religion was officially purged from the Technocracy during its 1800s reinvention, that heritage has never been completely dismissed.

Contrary to popular misconception, plenty of scientists are people of faith, and plenty of religious creeds respect science. Faith is typically regarded as the path to matters that science cannot fully address, and science is regarded as the divinely inspired key to material life. Within the Technocracy, science can *become* faith, too; Iteration X's veneration of The Machine, for example, provides a vision of God every bit as potent as some desert prophet's revelations.

So yes, certain Technocrats hold religious faith – often in an established creed, occasionally in a Technocratic religion that elevates science to a metaphysical ideal. And although openly religious behavior earns a wary eye from supervisors (and religious extremity receives a visit from the agents of Control), each individual is allowed some degree of personal faith... so long as that faith does not conflict with the ideals and duties of the Technocracy.

United and Alone

The world is a dangerous place and, as any agent soon learns, there's safety in numbers. Enlightened operatives meditate alone, but they learn to survive together – working with teams of agents, receiving instruction from their respective Conventions, resolving missions for their supervisors, and receiving information from a world monitored through extensive surveillance.

Just as the world holds infinite possibilities, it presents infinite perils. Once, it was a larger place, where distance could isolate communities from civilization. Before cell phones, satellites, jet travel, and the Internet, a tiny community on the other side of the planet could remain completely isolated from the world's most advanced civilizations. The boundary between possible and impossible was defined by the consensus of the local populace. If the people of a village believed that a shaman could heal the sick or talk to the dead, then the boundary between the possible and impossible shifted to accommodate that belief. The result was a patchwork world, where thousands of variants of different paradigms coexisted – a world where anything was possible, especially if the Sleeper witnesses around you believed it was. The result was chaos.

Indoctrinators in the Ivory Tower would have us believe that world was a dangerous anachronism. A world that accepts all truths is ultimately a world with no truth. When everything is permissible and nothing is forbidden, justice is impossible. As a mage gains more power, he strays from the reality, the justice, and the truth of the Masses around him. He becomes answerable only to himself – no matter what words of so-called wisdom his mentor gives him – until he strays too far and reality punishes him for his hubris. Among Tradition mages, the most powerful willworkers test the boundaries of the impossible. There is, however, a contesting point of view.

The Masses – the common populace of unAwakened Sleepers – have their own vision of how the world should

Future Fates: A Technocratic Upgrade?

Modern corporations change with the times. It stands to reason that the Technocracy would do the same. Rumor has it that the Technocracy is gearing up for a monumental re-org – a new-millennium upgrade that will purge a lot of the old bugs (and probably a lot of personnel as well) in an effort to address a brave new world.

Like the New Horizon Council, this reorganized Technocracy is an *optional* development. You can use it, ignore it, or modify it to suit your chronicle. If you're running a Technocracy-based chronicle, the news and implementation of the re-org could present a dramatic variation to the old "hunt Reality Deviants" thing... especially if the reorganized Technocracy has put your players on the termination list.

It's a good bet that the pending re-org comes courtesy of the Nephandic Inner Circle. What better way could there be, after all, to rattle loose the stubborn idealists than to reorganize the entire organization and find out who and where those malcontents might be? Such shakeups always have casualties, and if a bit of red ink winds up spilling over groups like Project Invictus, the Friends of Courage, and the Knights of New Avalon, well, that's just the cost of doing business.

As of 2015, the re-org is simply a rumor among the rank and file. The future configuration of this 21st-century Technocracy remains to be seen... assuming, of course, that the idealists remain alive to see it appear!

work. Consensus creates this vision, and the Sleepers' beliefs, in turn, create the Consensus. Although the Masses still cling to their regrettable religious extremes and cultural superstitions, increasing numbers of people share a predictable, orderly world – one in which two plus two will always equal four, gravity is an absolute, and magic is nothing more than a stage magician's repertoire of tricks and illusions.

Under the *Enlightened Anthropic Principle*, people with sufficient brilliance and dedication shape the world in general. Their Enlightenment channels great forces of probability and stability. And so, the agents of the Technocratic Union have a duty to use that Enlightenment for the common benefit of man. Those agents might need to shepherd the stupider elements of humanity toward those greener pastures, but – like shepherds – Technocrats are dedicated to guiding the flock and killing the wolves whenever it becomes necessary to do so.

(Some folks would argue that *Technocrats* are the wolves; to that claim, a Technocrat might respond that of *course* she's a wolf – an Alpha wolf safeguarding her pack. And could a pack survive without leadership and occasional ferocity? No. Case closed.)

Technocracy agents know which world the vast majority of humanity wants: one world with one immutable set of laws. No secret society was required to create it, although cabals of idealists have worked to reinforce its boundaries. Individuals might dissent, but the world we inhabit exists because, allegedly, this is the world the Masses want. Its stability depends on a staunch belief that the supernatural does not exist, that magic is not real. Science, not superstition, must be the order of the day. Guided and defended by the Technocracy, men and women must be masters of their own world.

This ideal is the world the Technocracy defends: not the world of the future, but the world of today. It's a world in which supernatural forces are not allowed to prey upon mankind. A world in which reality is shaped by a single unified vision, and all alternatives to safety and stability are eliminated. It's an ideal world, a theory that Enlightened minds developed in rarefied realms. The Technocracy's crusade is a crusade for Reality itself. As such, there will be casualties. Individuals will die so the collective can live.

As an agent of the Union, this is the new life that awaits you: the world of the Technocracy, the realm of uplift, progress, and Control.

The Dirty Side of the Coin

It all sounds so civilized. And it *is*. But this is the civilization of the sweatshop and the drone, where bulldozing a village and gunning down its people is a perfectly acceptable price for cheap fuel and higher stock dividends. A civilization in which the strong and capable rule the weak through distraction, indulgence, debt, and, when necessary, force. A civilization where police forces sweep in with military hardware to disperse and – when necessary – destroy perceived renegades. A civilization in which imagination is a commodity and compassion is a threat to the bottom line.

Are we talking about the Technocracy now or about our real world?

Yes.

The Technocracy represents the civilized ideal of achievement and control. On the shiny side of that coin, wealth and brilliance and convenience and prosperity beckon us with the promise of cool stuff and the luxury to enjoy it. On the flip side, that same coin is caked with blood and grease, the inevitable byproducts of mechanized society.

So is it possible to have the shine without the grime? Perhaps. But that new, improved reality might require a lot of work and a little bit of magic.

ITERATION X

Given the choice between frailty and perfection, no reasoning organism would choose its flaws.

Humans are weak, but technology makes us strong. Over generations, scientists have augmented humans with state-of-the-art tech, improving bodies and minds. Mass media disseminate news about these new inventions in order to uplift the Consensus; the greatest innovators of such enhancements, though, perfect their creations in absolute secrecy. Under the aegis of the "Clockwork Convention," elite Technocrats create hypertech devices in secluded laboratories and then deploy them to the Front Lines of an improved reality. Through many iterations of such progress, Enlightened visionaries develop integrated masterworks to surpass mere humanity, striving to meet their greatest challenge: artificial intelligences that can replace the flawed human mind. These Enlightened Scientists seek cybernetic perfection; with each generation, their creations improve. The state of the art is the current incarnation of Iteration X.

Refined over millennia from visionary artisans to posthuman mechanistics, Iteration X commands the most impressive firepower and most disciplined military capacities in the Union. Its military operatives boast weaponry as integral parts of their bodies, from energy-packed blasters to kinetic chain guns. Various enhancements make these agents faster and stronger than their all-too-human rivals. Meanwhile, clones conditioned in laboratories and trained as Kamrads bolster their ranks. Such operatives pride themselves on efficiency, each individual working as a part of a much larger machine.

Despite the Convention's military rep, not all Iterators are soldiers. This Convention also specializes in innovation, hyperefficiency, mass production, and statistical prediction. Some of the group's most visionary work is *virtual*, not *physical*, relying upon elaborate simulations and organic/mechanical integration technologies. Enlightened analysts simulate endless variations of events to predict outbreaks of anomalous phenomena, supernatural deviance, and other chaotic disruptions before they occur. Some operatives refine diverse skill sets, coordinating various operations through interconnected thought processes. Others appear perfectly mundane but are anything *but* that when you get beneath their skins.

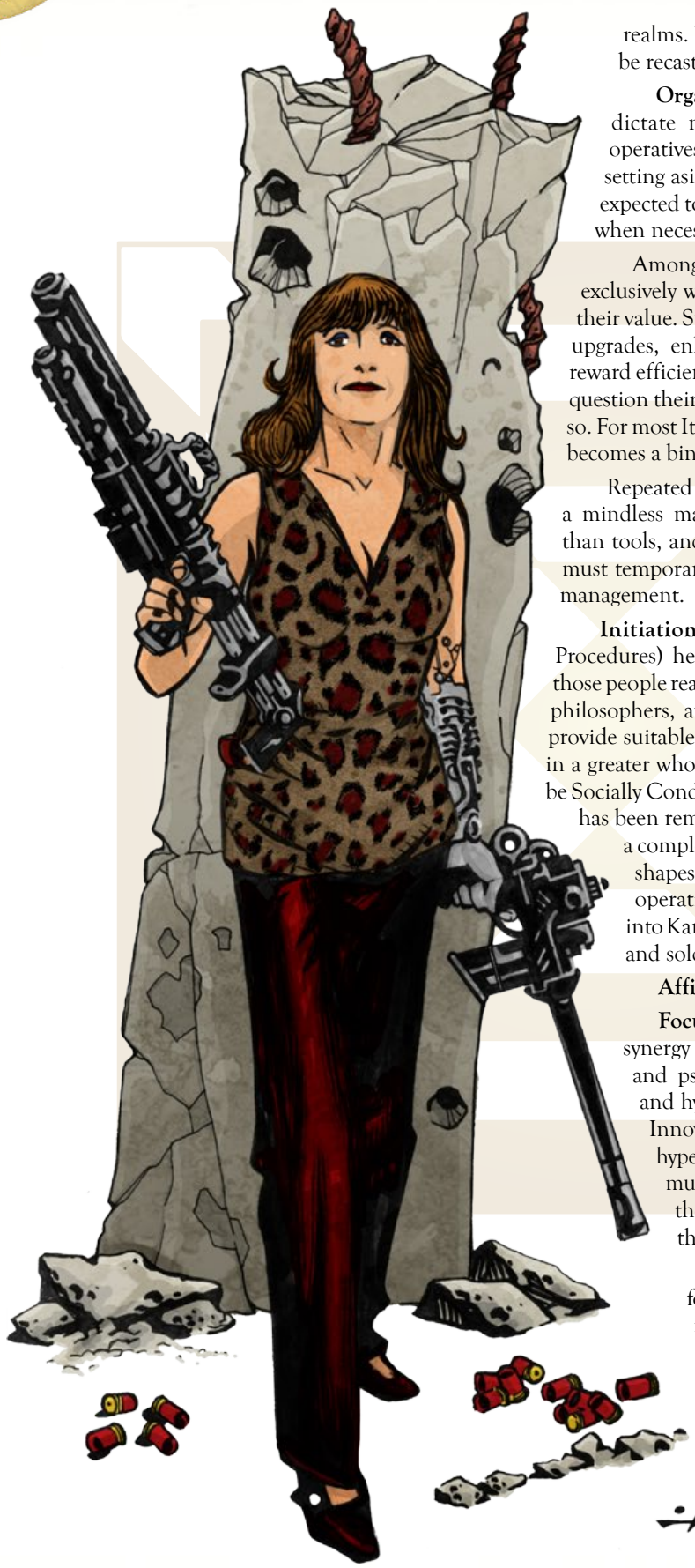
The Convention's most dangerous agents and weapons remain too advanced for Earthly Consensus; developed in remote facilities (off world, whenever possible), these armatures are shipped in from labs and factories filled with sublime hypertech. In the old days, the machine-realm called *Autocthonia* represented a near-mythic reflection of sublime perfection. New-millennium Iterators seem less dogmatic about cybernetic refinement – perhaps because Autocthonia fell victim to a Dimensional Anomaly, or maybe just because "Borging out" doesn't seem quite as cool as it used to be. Even so, certain Iterators believe full Empowerment is possible only within such

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: Lacking our drive toward perfection, they do the best they can. Still, our Union would be more efficient if our comrades adopted our successes in place of their own limitations.

The Traditions: Forces of visionary chaos, doomed to be replaced.

The Disparates: Sad remnants of primitive stages of evolution. Humanity has already moved beyond their kind.



realms. When humanity Ascends, they believe, all of reality will be recast in mechanistic perfection.

Organization: Iterators employ chains of command that dictate missions with mathematical precision. Ideally, the operatives and their Convention work as parts of a larger machine, setting aside autonomy and ego. Both agents and supervisors are expected to perform to their utmost ability, sacrificing themselves, when necessary, for the greater good.

Among the lower ranks, Socially Conditioned Iterators work exclusively with one another, refining their teamwork and proving their value. Successful agents gradually achieve free will, greater trust, upgrades, enhancements, and cross-Convention assignments that reward efficient flexibility. Experienced Iterators learn to critique and question their superiors but also to wait until the right moment to do so. For most Iterators, gray areas are unacceptable; instead, each action becomes a binary choice, swiftly evaluated as either success or failure.

Repeated failures condemn an Iterator to serve time as part of a mindless machine. The lowest-ranking operatives are little more than tools, and a powerful cyborg who cannot manage his resources must temporarily surrender his autonomy to more efficient external management.

Initiation: Sophisticated calculations (that is, Time-based Procedures) help Iteration X recruiters find likely personnel before those people reach Enlightenment. Soldiers, scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, and even people with profound physical handicaps all provide suitable personnel, so long as they can accept an essential role in a greater whole. Previously Awakened recruits are rare, but they can be Socially Conditioned to accept assimilation. Once a potential initiate has been removed from the distracting imperfections of the Masses, a complex process of indoctrination, surgery, and enhancement shapes each Iterator into an effective and often Enlightened operative. Failed experiments, meanwhile, get deconstructed into Kamrads and Ciphers, creating an army of obedient workers and soldiers who act in unison toward programmed goals.

Affinity Spheres: Forces, Matter, or Time.

Focus: The core of Iteration X science comes from the synergy between organic, mechanical, social, mathematical, and psychological elements. And so, cybernetics, craftwork and hypertech forge the foundation of this group's practices. Innovative Iterators employ martial arts, social dominion, hypereconomics, and reality hacking – after all, even perfection must be flexible! A few even hold a demi-religious faith in the ultimate potential of The Machine; these days, though, they don't often discuss that out loud.

A Mechanistic Cosmos presents the obvious paradigm for Iteration X. Clearly, *Tech Holds All Answers*. Math-inclined members of this Convention assure their comrades that *Everything is Data*. This group has no use for "fuzzy" paradigms, so the Sphere of Dimensional Science is an extremely rare discipline among its ranks.

Concepts: Heavy-weapons specialist, cyborg grunt, intelligence analyst, surveillance expert, fabricator, inventor, repair tech, clone supervisor, roboticist, tactician.

N.W.O.

NEW WORLD ORDER

Consensus shapes reality. The world we see is the one the Masses want. At the moment, that vision is obscene. We will fix it for the betterment of all.

Knowledge grants power, and *true* knowledge should be restricted to those with the appropriate respect for the power it contains. As masters of information and indoctrination, the agents of the New World Order alter data to enforce their vision of a perfect world. Masses, as these Technocrats understand, remain safest when they're kept blissfully, ignorantly asleep. Humanity prospers best in a world where deviance is hidden, science is predictable, and controlled technology empowers those people who have the training to handle it.

The group's now-infamous name comes from the philosophies of 18th-century idealists. Proposing a global state in which random elements such as primitive societies, art, magic, and even religion were abolished in favor of benevolently imposed order, these heretical masters began disseminating the concept through secret lodges and assorted allies across the world. During Queen Victoria's reign, this group consolidated its power within the existing Cabal of Pure Thought. Moving that group from a religious foundation to a secular one, the idealists purged their superstitionist peers through campaigns of truth reform and rhetorical intrigue. Reason replaced religion as the paragon of their newly ordered world. Joining forces with Inspector Rathbone's Skeleton Keys, those idealists forged their metaphorical Ivory Tower with London at its center and Victorious Britannia its figurehead. By the time American conspiracist Robert Welch began spreading the term among the Masses in the early 1970s, the New World Order was many decades old.

The bedrock of this group involves control of information… and thus, of possibilities. To this end, the Convention employs a three-pronged strategy: eliminate dissent and Reality Deviance, consolidate information and Enlightenment, and propagate the image of a safely governed world. Using all three elements to reinforce one another, the Order strives to bring chaos to heel. It's a titanic labor, to be sure, and one in which open conflict remains undesirable. Therefore, the NWO prefers *covert* action to *overt* action. Beneath a cover of secrets and misdirection, the rampant elements of deviant reality can be taken down, erased, and revised to fit a more productive truth.

Information provides the cornerstone of NWO operations. And so, the Order employs advanced surveillance, field agents, and data-tracking processes to collect and assimilate intelligence throughout the world. Meanwhile, those field-agent teams also hunt down deviant elements for elimination or recruitment. Captured RDs get subjected to intense Social Conditioning sessions – refinements of the same Conditioning that errant members of the Technocracy undergo in order to bring them back into line. By the end of that programming, those Deviants either join the Union as productive citizens or else become will-broken ragdolls in the Order's hands. Either way, they no longer threaten the Consensus.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: We know their secrets; they do their jobs… or else.

The Traditions: A promising field of potential recruits poisoned by toxic ideologies and disruptive tendencies. Convert them when possible, exterminate them otherwise.

The Disparates: The persistent heirs of primitive cultures. Convert or exterminate as necessary.

Organization: Reflecting that three-pronged strategy, the NWO employs three primary Methodologies to implement its goals. The **Operative** group sends agents – typically the Black Suits, though it employs less obvious agents too – into the field to address threats and collect intelligence. The **Ivory Tower** handles administration and implementation throughout the entire Technocracy and also disseminates controlled truths through Sleeper academia. Meanwhile, the **Watchers** collect information, simultaneously circulating messages of control and complacency among the Masses so as to minimize chaos and dissent. All three agencies report to upper-echelon supervisors, who direct operations from safe distance.

Meanwhile, two other Methodologies – **Q Division** and **the Feed** – provide support for the other operations. Technically a cross-Convention imperative, Q Division provides the field gear for Technocratic agents (NWO and otherwise), and the Feed assesses and guides the growing power of the Internet and its many social technologies. Within all NWO divisions, an ascending order of seniority (Black Suits/ Gray Suits/ White Suits) reflects what the Order calls the "purification of genius" and the formality of control.

Initiation: By reviewing standardized academic and vocational tests, scanning databases, and coordinating covert surveillance efforts, the Ivory Tower selects potential recruits. Generally, a new recruit dies to his oldlife and enters a newlife as a NWO trainee. Other recruits get converted from among the Union's enemies, by way of the Order's sophisticated Social Conditioning techniques.

Because these tactics can be very resource-intensive, the NWO bolsters its ranks with clones: unEnlightened constructs trained to act in unison, empowered with a telepathic hive mind, and chemically altered to disintegrate upon death. As a matter of course, the NWO subjects its agents to varying degrees of indoctrination and social conditioning, depending on individual performance and their roles out there in the field.

AffinitySpheres: Mind or Correspondence/ Data.

Focus: In *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Might is Right* and *Tech Holds All Answers*. Social dominion and the command of consciousness – that is, the influence, harnessing, programming, and reprogramming of the *homo sapiens* mind – provides the cornerstone of this New World Order's techniques. To that end, psychic training, information manipulation, perceptual conditioning, and symbolic connections (like a man wearing a formal black suit and carrying a badge) provide the essential tools for NWO Procedures. Physical media constitute the second level of manipulation, with the third and most brutal level – force – channeled through guns, armor, gadgets, hypertech vehicles, advanced weaponry, and the martial arts training all operatives receive. Paranoia, however, is the Order's strongest weapon. If people *believe* you can do something, after all, their belief tilts reality in your favor before you even begin to act.

PROGENITORS

Potential horror is the cost of liberation.
Only when we face the first can we secure the second.

Gods do not create and destroy life. Scientific laws do. With an understanding of such laws, then, nothing separates a man from a god. In fact, given the errant nature of gods, a dedicated scientist can improve on the decidedly *un*intelligent designs of natural selection and thus become greater than the capricious divinities of legend. The Progenitors – those Technocrats working toward beginnings – understand that the only things standing between flawed evolution and a new, improved strain of organic life are the understanding of organic principles and the willingness to reshape them to one's own design.

Originating in the esoteric and often forbidden mysteries of life and death, this Convention retains the scary allure of its witchy forebears. From bloody-handed midwives and dirty-fingered herbalists to the hunters and domesticators of nature's rough beasts, the Progenitors share their beginnings with the mystic Verbenae. But whereas the earthy Pagans kept their craft wrist-deep in entrails, the embalmers and physicians of the classical era studied the workings of mortality and the methods of transcending it. Medicine came first, followed by the manipulation of living organisms: adaptation, mutation, artificial limbs and organs, chemical enhancements... the possibilities seemed limited only by technology and fear.

But fear's a powerful force. Despite their many victories and cures, these physicians remained pariahs among the terrified cattle they sought to save. Even when the healer Hippocrates established his Cosian Circle in ancient Greece, mortal terror haunted the practitioners of those fearsome arts. The descendants of that Circle joined the Order of Reason during the medieval era, but not even their tireless work to cure that age's plagues could save some Cosians from flames and censure. Is it any wonder, then, that Progenitors tend to hold a chip on their collective shoulders?

When Darwin's work popularized what the Cosians already knew – that life is organic adaptation, not divine providence – the Cosians adapted as well. Shedding their classical trappings in favor of Victorian formalism and the budding scientific method, these small-p progenitors continued to push the boundaries of healing and mutation. The First and Second World Wars gave them plenty of material to work with, and though some of those experiments were... shall we say, *unethical*... the data gained from 20th-century conflicts vaulted the Progenitors to the horizons of organic potential.

These days, a Progenitor enjoys clean facilities and bleeding-edge technologies developed far outside Earth's invasive ecosystems. Healing, cloning, genetic manipulation, viral evolution, chemical consciousness, biological mutation, animal crossbreeding, accelerated and controlled evolution, compound synthesis... their list of projects and accomplishments makes Iteration X look dull. Despite their reputation – even within the Union – as "Frankensteinians," these visionaries retain the courage and imagination of their ancestors, bravely shaping new worlds from primal materials and fresh technologies.

Organization: Throughout its various Methodologies (**Pharmacopoeists**, **Genegineers**, **FACADE Engineers**, and the cross-disciplinary **Damage Control**), this Convention follows an academic hierarchy. UnEnlightened facilitators (janitors, lab assistants, receptionists) provide support for the ascending

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: The strong right arms of our body scientific.

The Traditions: A mud-smeared pack of evolutionary mistakes.

The Disparates: Apparently, and thankfully, extinct.

ranks of Students, Research Associates, Primary Investigators, Research Directors, and the mysterious Administrators. A ruthless but unEnlightened contingent of field and street operatives (backed up by the Conventions' considerably more capable collection of clones, constructs, Victors, biomodified agents, and bestial projects) provides muscle when needed. The most versatile Progenitor agents learn techniques and Procedures from all of these disciplines, developing formidable arsenals of scientific knowledge.

Advancement through those ranks demands constant study, research, and innovation. Students must pass many tests, eventually providing and defending a thesis that demonstrates her mastery of Enlightened Science. Success means promotion to progressively higher levels, levels at which the various scientists contend for grants and resources. Investigators spend copious amounts of time working with teams of other agents to prove their loyalty and usefulness to the Technocracy. As one would expect, if they can't publish successful results for the Union, they might perish for their failure.

Initiation: This Convention prefers to find potential recruits before they Awaken. Working with the Ivory Tower, Progenitor supervisors analyze standardized tests and search databases to find clever scholars with budding potential. (Recruiting Progenitors *after* their Awakening is more difficult... but the Union offers answers for troubled minds.) Promising recruits get tagged before medical school, sponsored with scholarships, and offered a chance for something *more*. If a recruit accepts, she receives training above and beyond what the Masses can offer; if she refuses, then the entire episode gets wiped from her mind and she just has a bad quarter, defined only by hazy recollections and a lingering feeling that she missed something grand. In the worst cases, the student ODs on recreational drugs or suffers stress-based suicide. The Progenitors hate to waste good material, but life isn't always fair.

Specialty Spheres: Life and either Entropy or Mind.

Focus: The intricate enigmas and potential of organic life provide the foundation of Progenitor techniques. Upon that framework, an individual Progenitor can build a wide variety of innovations. Although specific applications must be scientifically defensible (see ***"Wait – I can Explain!"*** in the **Chapter Six** sidebar ***SCIENCE!!!***, **p. 290**), the Progenitors employ a dizzying variety of theories and Procedures. That said, those weird-science techniques typically demand the presence of a well-stocked lab and intricate, often time-consuming, labor. Any tool that a healer, scientist, or naturalist would use can yield miraculous results in the skillful hands of a trained Technocrat, but the Progenitors usually need time and space to work their miracles.

To certain evolutionists, *Might is Right*, paradigm-wise. Most Progenitors, however, favor the agnostic Gaia-hypothesis approach to *Creation's Divine and Alive*. Cybernetics blend in with a hypertech approach to medicine-work, and the Convention's eclectic methods often seem like weird science by the standards of other Conventions.

SYNDICATE

Whoever makes the gold makes the rules.
And fortunately, I can do both.

Money is power – not only because of what it can buy but because the very *idea* of money defines what people are worth. Words like "value," "wealth," and yes, "worth" reflect the influence money holds in human society. We define ourselves and view others in ways often based on fiscal ability. Notions of class and style depend upon the things that money can buy. And so, in many ways, the Syndicate is the most powerful group on Earth today.

You wouldn't know it to hear the scuttlebutt. After all, popular misconception links the word "syndicate" with the lowlifes of organized crime. A common image of Syndicate operatives depicts them as gangsters – dangerous, certainly, but no match for true Enlightenment. And although there's some truth to that impression (illegal goods, after all, *are* profitable), it's a carefully maintained camouflage that cloaks the true scope and power of this Convention. On the few occasions when a Tradition mage crosses paths with an obvious Syndicate rep, bullets are sure to be exchanged. What that pitiful sorcerer never understands, though, is that the gun-toting bully is as close to the halls of influence as most spell-slinging weirdoes ever get. The *real* power, meanwhile, rests comfortably in executive offices high above the fray.

In many ways, the Syndicate has *always* run the Technocracy. Where else, after all, would the Craftmasons have gotten the funds to build their cannons? How else could the Explorators have constructed their ships? Artisans and priests and knights all need money in order to purchase the tools and toys of which they're all so proud. And since the earliest days, that money has come from the vaults of the High Guild. In return, the Guildsmen extracted taxes, tithes, and plunder at the same time that they set the agendas... and, quite often, the very *realities*... that governed the other Conventions. Though the Guild seldom got its own hands dirty, its operatives and funds spread the group's influence across the human world.

Stripped of its gangland connotations, the word *syndicate* refers to "those who bring things together." When the Order of Reason transformed itself in the 1800s, the High Guild (whose name, *guild*, refers to payment in gold) assumed that word as its name. While other Technocrats experimented in labs, chased Reality Deviants, or pushed the boundaries of science into the 20th century, the Syndicate brought them all together through the power of wealth. Bankers, tradesman, politicians, and the occasional criminal tied the world into a single profitable enterprise, linked by global commerce, diplomacy, and media. From the international shipping companies of the imperial age to the pervasive corporations of today's world, the Syndicate has literally banked on human progress.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: We've got a winning team so long as they remember which side their bread is buttered on, and forget who holds the knife.

The Traditions: Some gamblers don't know when to fold their cards and go home. If that means liquidating them entirely, so be it.

The Disparates: Red ink on the hoof, they're like homeless drunks running loose in your casino with half-loaded .45s. In short, they're bankrupt enough to be dangerous.

And so, although most of the Ascension War has pitted Black Suits and HIT Marks against desperate superstitionists, the Syndicate has consolidated the world into a handful of associated corporations… most of which it controls.

This sounds sinister… and yet, without trade and money, culture as we know it would be impossible. Language and mathematics evolved through trade; technologies spread through commerce; regulated monetary systems helped civilizations expand and prosper. Even Jesus understood the importance of "rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's." Money and its attendant benefits are the rewards earned by hard work and imaginative enterprise. It stands to reason, then, that the people who understand those systems best should be the ones who benefit from it most.

Organization: Organized like a corporation (or perhaps it's the other way around…), the Syndicate descends in a top-down pyramid. At the apex sits a CEO and 10 Vice Presidents of Operations (VPOs) who head the Board; from there, the various Chairmen (or Vision Men) answer to the Board, supervising each Construct and Symposium. Managers answer to these Chairmen, and Associates (or Magic Men) answer to the Managers. Those Associates comprise the lowest rank of unEnlightened Syndicate ops, with Providers (a.k.a. Our Friends or simply Staples) rounding out the lowest duties and handling most of the busywork at the bottom of that pyramid.

Initiation: Talent, hard work, industrious imagination, and a gift for playing hardball mean everything in this Convention. Recruits often come from offices or business schools where scouts watch for rising stars… especially ones who are deeply in debt, incredibly skillful, or both. After a series of interviews, the would-be recruit is tested, employed as a Provider, and groomed for ruthless acumen and personal responsibility. If and when a prospective Associate reveals that *she* controls money rather than letting money control *her*, she receives a promotion to the head division. There, she begins to learn the secrets of desire and the means to manipulate reality's bottom line.

Affinity Spheres: Entropy, Mind or Primal Utility.

Focus: *Ars Cupiditae*, the Art of Desire, provides the heart of Syndicate methodology. Refined by the High Guild during the medieval period, this portfolio of techniques focuses on self-mastery and social psychology. Essentially, the practitioner disciplines his own body and mind, refines relationship techniques, and establishes a kingdom around himself that he gradually expands into an empire of subtle but compelling influence.

Except in the most desperate circumstances, a Syndicate rep *never* resorts to vulgar Procedures; even then, those Adjustments employ high-tech weapons, martial arts, or other stylishly technological methods. Most often, a Syndicate Associate manipulates people and systems with subtle yet effective nudges – phone calls, bribes, handshakes, perfumes, seductions, power lunches, PowerPoint presentations, hypereconomics, social domination, and so on – that get other people to pull the trigger while the Associate tallies up the profits. *Might is Right* in the Syndicate world; without it, civilization as we know it is on a *One-Way Trip to Oblivion*.

Void Engineers

**Nightmares live among us,
even as humanity remains asleep and dreaming.**

The cosmos are vast and dangerous. Like the savage frontiers of old, the many dimensions must be tamed, catalogued, and assimilated into a safely controlled cosmos. At worst, they should be sealed away so that the monsters on the other side cannot disrupt the Consensus... which they have a nasty tendency to do whenever they get the chance. That void must be engineered – not merely tolerated, but transformed. And since the Renaissance, this Convention has understood that goal and worked to shape chaos into stability.

In the tenuous balance between humanity and the Void, this Convention maintains a careful (and sometimes unsuccessful) foothold. Originally founded as two separate groups – the Celestial Masters and the Explorators (a.k.a. the Void Seekers) – the Convention discovered that the promise of Heaven Above was a lie; instead, a trackless Void stretched off into infinity, ripe with horrors that made the hells of Dutch painters look insignificant. As Explorators mapped out the mysteries of the human world, Celestial Masters began exploring that Void. In the late 1800s, the groups merged into a single faction. Its duty: to chart the mysteries and keep them from polluting the Earth.

On one hand, the Engineers pursue an imperial agenda of conquest and sterilization; on the other, they're not wrong about the threats they confront. No Technocracy Convention has nearly as much hands-on experience with the unspeakably counterrational Otherworlds and their equally ineffable hosts. The brain-twisting expertise of this Convention has allowed the Technocracy to shut down Nazi invocations, Marauder reality storms, and Reality Deviant strongholds. The Technocracy owes its Horizon Constructs, ectoplasmic disruptors, machine realms, and sentinel satellites to these Engineers, whose Border Corps Division steps in where cyborgs fear to tread. Most of all, perhaps, the Union owes its supply of Quintessential energies to this convention. And so although the Wanderers (an old name that still applies) might be the loosest cannon on the Technocratic gunship, they're a damn powerful force, politically and otherwise.

The Void Engineers hold one goal above and beyond all others: *defend humanity against everything beyond the Gauntlet.* To that end, high-tech laboratories maintain barriers against unauthorized crossings; heavily armed marines seek and destroy anything that crosses that line. Alien incursions, mystical spirits, astral entities, and ghostly apparitions all pose threats to the safety of the human race, but the Void Engineers possess the

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: A fractured collection of useful allies to be guided, placated, feared, ignored, and occasionally destroyed as necessary.

The Traditions: An unstable bunch of cosmic riff-raff whose antics have done more to endanger humanity than every pack of aspiring Nephandi combined.

The Disparates: The last holdouts of essentially extinct primitives. Sad, really. Their day in the sun ended centuries ago, and yet they still act as though they speak in coherent sentences.

tools and talent to oppose them all. And although most Technocrats hate to admit this, legions of extradimensional entities already hide throughout the human world, entrenched on the Front Lines of the battle for reality. Void Engineers track them down, using specialized training to hunt exotic prey.

To tip the balance between order and chaos, Void Engineers prefer to know their foes. They lead expeditions to extradimensional realms to study impossible creatures in their unnatural habitats. For the sake of survival, they'll recruit Technocrats from other Conventions to assist them, but Void Engineers insist on leading the way. Research provides a common goal, of course. When the fate of the world's at stake, however, a preemptive strike can buy a little more time for humanity.

Given these alien environments and pursuits, it's not surprising that Engineers seem kind of odd. All too often, operatives return from off-world assignments as hollow-eyed malcontents in need of social processing. Indeed, the Wanderers have their own sanity division, the *Descartes Institute of Mental Health*, where Earthbound Social Processing is broken and replaced with a more suitable mentality. Despite their longstanding image as freewheeling space hippies or hammerheaded star-grunts, this Convention boasts many of the Union's most dedicated and accomplished members. Each Engineer, regardless of her post, is a *scientist*; all other duties remain secondary.

Organization: Especially in the wake of the Dimensional Anomaly, Void Engineer groups follow military-style ranks: Technicians, Marines, and Cadets form the lowest echelon, graduating upward to become Enforcers (who guard the borders), Explorers (who chart new territory), Investigators (who pursue scientific inquiries), or Researchers (who develop new tech). Higher-ranking personnel within these levels assume command of individual units. At the highest level, a series of Coordinators handles the logistical and administrative responsibilities, overseeing the Convention as a whole. **(Note:** In an Avatar Storm metaplot, this Convention changes drastically; see **Convention Book: Void Engineers** for details.)

Initiation: Recruiting personnel from among top-level researchers, tech geeks with an eye for unconventional applications of science, and folks who feel disappointed by science program cutbacks, the Engineers bring their Cadets off-world to specially designed training and research facilities. From that point onward, a Cadet is considered initiated whether or not she ever achieves Enlightenment – she's seen too much to ever be considered mundane again.

Specialty Spheres: Dimensional Science (Spirit), Correspondence, or Forces.

Focus: As every Engineer knows, only *Tech Holds All Answers* in *A World of Gods and Monsters*. Without imposed order, *Everything is Chaos*. And so, hypertech melds with cybernetics, craftwork, cosmic reality hacking, and a formalized type of weird science.

Mind-bending quantum physics, and the machines created to channel those physics, form the core of Wanderer beliefs. To that end, they adapt alien technologies and sanitized versions of ancient spiritual Arts, incorporated through reconciliation theories that bind those ideas and energies to scientific methods. In the Realms beyond Earth's limited reality sphere, Void Engineer technologies have all the subtlety of a big-budget science-fiction film. Blasters slide out of holsters, power-armor suits become essential, and titanic Universal craft (that is, spaceships) are the order of the day.

Part IV: The Disparates

"He cannot see you."

"Yeah, I'm kind of used to that."

"I do not mean in the usual way, Simon," she tells me. "I mean you have been removed from his sight."

"That must be a relief to him."

"Why?"

"Because..." I try, and fail, to keep the bitterness out of my voice. "...it's easier for him to forget me if he can't see me."

Her face gives nothing away. Behind that veil, there's not much of it I can see. I guess in her country, you have to learn to read people's eyes and voice. There's not much more there to work with. It's disconcerting, to be honest. All the usual cues disappear.

The cop strides by like he owns the place. For all practical purposes, he does. The color of his skin's less important than the color of his uniform, but both colors make him more respectable than me. Than me and the veiled girl, I should say. I still don't know where she came from, but she seems to have been around here for a while. As the cop passes, he doesn't even slow down. His face and body never get that squinting look I'm so familiar with. Damn straight, he can't see us. I could get used to this.

"Why was he looking for you?" she asks without a whisper. The cop's ears don't even flicker and he doesn't break stride.

"He wasn't," I tell her.

"Then why...?"

I don't mean to laugh at her, but I do. Again, the cop hears nothing. "You really AREN'T from around here, are you?"

"A little ways off," she replies. Again, I get nothing from her face. It occurs to me that maybe she's wearing the veil less out of custom or habit than out of practicality. With that on her face, you can't read her.

"So how'd you do that?"

"A useful trick," she says, looking past me at the cop. He's off doing whatever cops do in their heads when they're not trying to bust mine. This time, I can sense amusement in her voice.

"I'll bet," I tell her. "Think you could teach me that one?"

"Why else did you think I was here?" she asks, looking me in the eyes. I wait for her to say my full name, like it's some kind of spell. That's the way scenes like this are supposed to go, I guess, but she's doesn't say it.

I crack a smile for both of us. "I don't know, but I've got a feeling I'm about to find out..."

Hey, Didn't You Join the...?

According to several **Revised**-era sourcebooks, many Crafts merged into various Traditions, most notably the Hermetic Houses of Ngoma and Solificati, plus the Wu Lung presence within the Akashayana and the Hermetic House Hong Lei. Did that happen? Well, that depends upon the wishes of each individual Storyteller.

In official **Mage 20** terms, those mergers *did* occur; the converts, however, reflect only a small percentage of the group's total membership. Some individuals might have genuinely changed their allegiance and now belong solidly to their Tradition of choice... in which case and by definition, they're not members of the Disparate Alliance. Even if they share origins and practices with their Craft, these days they're Tradition mages, not Disparates.

Other converts have deeper agendas. Sure, they'll use the Council and its Traditions as shelter, aid, and backup. In their hearts, however, they're still Disparates, working toward the goals of their original Craft, the Alliance, or both. If a conflict erupts, they'll be the knives in the backs and the banana peels under the feet of their respective Traditions. In the event of large-scale warfare, this could provide an ugly surprise for the Council... possibly even a fatal one.

On the flipside, these bridges between Council and Disparates might provide a game-changing stability for both groups instead. Just as the Etherites and Virtual Adepts jumped ship to join the Council, so too might shared membership bring groups like the Bata'a, Ngoma, Solificati, and Templars fully into the Council's fold. The Traditions and Crafts could join together, cementing the Unity that the Ahl-i-Batin have pursued for centuries. If things go that way, the original promise of the Council could emerge in the new millennium as a larger, more inclusive mystic faction... a true match for the Technocratic Union.

In the meantime, those groups might remain divided between the Traditions and Disparates, maybe even disputing the true course of their respective sects. As anyone who's studied occult societies can attest, such divisions are maddeningly common in the real world as well as in the World of Darkness. Secret societies frequently take many different forms, each one ostensibly the One True Order of Mystic Whateverness. As in many other cases, **Mage 20** leaves the final answers to these questions up to you.

Practiced Subtleties

The rumor of their deaths has been greatly exaggerated.

Oh, sure it's been said that the Crafts – those Disparate sects that refused to join either the Traditions or Technocracy – have been more or less exterminated by the turn of the millennium. That's the most convenient story for both groups to tell. The Traditions would like to think that anyone outside their safe little world is doomed, and the Technocrats have declared victory over their mystic rivals. Thus, it stands to reason that those Disparates have all but disappeared, their members either scattering into the various Traditions or else being hunted to extinction at Technocratic hands.

That's the official story. And it's not even remotely true.

In actuality, many of the best-known groups on the fringes of the Ascension War are not only alive and well but have been quietly banding together into their own configuration: a sarcastically named *Disparate Alliance* whose ironic moniker mocks the Council's vision of itself as Magekind's Great White Savior. Although several Crafts – the uncanny Hem-Ka Sobk and the demon-bound Wu-Keng among them – *have* apparently been obliterated, the larger groups have not only survived but have, in the shadows, prospered.

How? It's not hard to understand. "The Subtle Ones" is literally the name assumed by the Ahl-i-Batin, and other groups like the Bata'a and Sisters of Hippolyta have spent centuries being more or less invisible. Coming, as so many Craft mages do, from dispossessed cultures and so-called "un-people," the Disparate groups have lots of practice with disappearing. When witch-hunters came calling or slave-masters cracked down, these people knew how to hide their practices and make all the right excuses. Concealing their power has been second nature for quite some time.

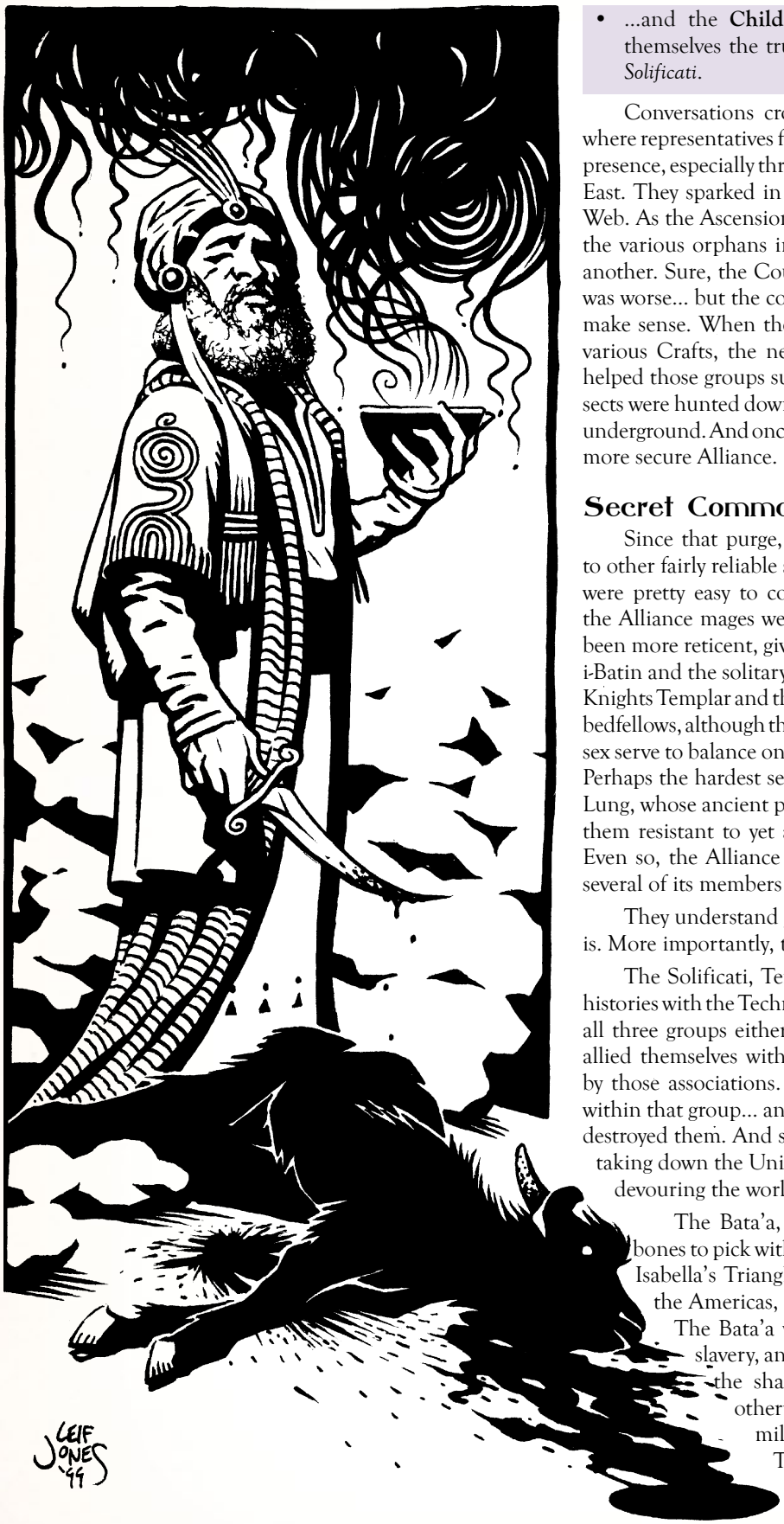
The time for such concealment, though, may be ending soon.

A Silent Alliance

In the 1990s, many Disparate representatives began laying groundwork for an alliance. Like other folks who'd been living on the fringes until then, they recognized the potential of global social media, virtual contact, and mutual protection. Before the Internet, such people had to find physical locations to meet; however, as the world got wired, the need for safe physical space faded. By the turn of the millennium, hundreds of Disparate mages had made contact with each other and begun to plan. Perhaps an Alliance freed from the baggage of the Nine Traditions could be a good idea after all...

Five groups provided the foundation for this Alliance:

- The **Batini**, now seeking new partners for a fresh path toward Unity;
- The **Ngoma**, whose work across the so-called dark continent has left them fairly obscure since the Renaissance;
- The **Bata'a**, perhaps the largest of the sects, whose influence spans from North and South Americas to East and Central Africa;
- The **Hollow Ones**, disgusted with Tradition bullshit and looking to make something better;



- ...and the **Children of Knowledge**, who consider themselves the true heirs of that much-(ab)used title, *Solificati*.

Conversations cropped up in the global club culture, where representatives from those five groups maintain a strong presence, especially throughout Europe, India, and the Middle East. They sparked in chat rooms and sectors of the Digital Web. As the Ascension Warrior prepared to invade Horizon, the various orphans in Heylel's army started talking to one another. Sure, the Council was broken and the Technocracy was worse... but the concept of a Disparate Alliance began to make sense. When the Technocracy locked its sights on the various Crafts, the networks established by those meetings helped those groups survive the purge. Though a few smaller sects were hunted down, the budding Alliance took the others underground. And once concealed, those mages crafted a larger, more secure Alliance.

Secret Common Ground

Since that purge, the core groups have made overtures to other fairly reliable sects around the world. The Kopa Loei were pretty easy to convince... especially because so few of the Alliance mages were Caucasian *ha'oles*. The Taftâni have been more reticent, given their troubled history with the Ahl-i-Batin and the solitary nature of the Weavers in general. The Knights Templar and the Sisters of Hippolyta make *very* strange bedfellows, although their customary exclusions of the opposite sex serve to balance one another out within the greater group. Perhaps the hardest sell, though, has been the venerable Wu Lung, whose ancient pedigree and infamous pride have made them resistant to yet another group of round-eyed cohorts. Even so, the Alliance has a lot to offer... especially because several of its members know a secret:

They understand just how corrupt the Technocracy truly is. More importantly, they believe they know *why*.

The Solificati, Templars, and Wu Lung have long, ugly histories with the Technocratic Union. At one time or another, all three groups either belonged to the Order of Reason or allied themselves with it. And all three have been betrayed by those associations. They've seen the heart of corruption within that group... and in the case of the Templars, it almost destroyed them. And so, for them, there's a personal stake in taking down the Union. It is, quite literally, the Great Beast devouring the world.

The Bata'a, Kopa Loei, Ngoma, and Sisters have bones to pick with the Union too. After all, it was Queen Isabella's Triangle Trade that savaged both Africa and the Americas, and Explorator ships gutted Polynesia. The Bata'a were forged by 500 years of genocide, slavery, and hate, whereas the Sisters have dodged the shadow of patriarchy (Technocratic and otherwise) since their inception roughly three millennia ago. And then you've got the Taftâni, whose Arts have been fouled with Paradox and whose people have been

Who's Holding Whose Strings?

So is it *true*? Is the Technocracy secretly controlled by the Fallen? As we saw in the previous section, it *might* be... or it might *not* be. The important thing is that the Disparate Alliance *believes* it is. That belief could cause all kinds of complications if it turns out that the Union is not actually controlled by Nephandic infiltrators... especially if it turns out that the Traditions secretly *are*. Maybe *nobody* is being controlled by the Nephandi, but everybody thinks that the *other* group is. The Fallen don't actually *have* to be involved at all... although they might have been the ones spreading rumors about their involvement. What a mess. Isn't paranoia fun?

burnt by technological fires. So yes – it *is* personal for them all. The Technocratic Pogrom just solidified the Alliance's resolve.

Meanwhile, the Batini have an equally rough history with the Nephandi. As the shadow of the Subtle Ones, the Fallen share certain traits with the Batini. Both groups are subtle, persuasive, the masters of misdirection and deceit. The Batini pursue Unity, but Nephandi encourage disintegration. Both groups hold ancient grudges against one another... and so, once the Templars, Solificati, and Wu Lung claimed to have discovered Fallen puppet masters within the Technocracy, the course of action became clear.

In many ways, the Nephandi truly forged the core of this unlikely Alliance. Whether by their infiltration of the already-hated Technocracy; the bloody ties between these Devil-Kings and the Weavers and Batini who drove them from the Middle East; their horrific crimes again the Sisters, Kopa Loei, Hollow Ones, and Bata'a; or simply their Satanic nature – which puts them straight in the Templars' sights – the Fallen have made many dedicated enemies. So then, it stands to reason that those enemies would find common cause, despite their many differences, in the despised Technocracy and the Nephandi they believe are behind it.

The Alliance can't attack the Technocracy head on. That's not just suicide – it's bad tactics and terrible PR. As the Traditions have shown, direct assaults tend to kill the wrong people. Instead, the Alliance has started doing what oppressed people often do: wearing the master down from the inside out, launching subtle campaigns of sabotage, subversion, misdirection, and exposure.

So what *about* the Traditions? According to the official story, survivors from the Crafts joined various groups within the Council. To a degree, that's true; some refugees *did* find new homes among the Council mages. Most of them simply hold a second allegiance to the Disparate Alliance too. After all, the Technocracy's not the *only* master who deserves to be taken down a few pegs...

Organization

At least for now, the Disparate Alliance is a loose confederation of independent states, lacking the protocols, centralized leadership, common titles, Ascension ideals, and other complexities of the Council and Technocracy. Each Ally is a self-governing unit that cooperates voluntarily with the group as a whole. Given the abuses each group has suffered in the past and the logistical impossibilities of, say, having the either the Templars or the Sisters taking orders from (or giving orders to) each other, that's probably how things will stay, at least for a while. This informality presents both a strength and a weakness for the Alliance as a whole.

Currently, the Alliance functions on a lot of promises and very little else. Out of necessity, this must change if the Disparates are to become less... disparate. In order to take on an enemy as powerful and established as the Technocratic Union (or, for that matter, the Council of Traditions), the Alliance needs more stability than it currently enjoys. It's easy to maintain cohesion when you're essentially invisible, but if your alliance plans to survive the first major clash with a rival, it's going to need more than a common hatred for that enemy.

This Disparate Alliance combines some *very* different groups – sects whose practices and philosophies can be diametrically opposed. A stable group requires a certain power of authority, and although the individual sects have *internal* authorities, no one has yet figured out how to resolve things if the sects themselves come to blows. Considering that the Templars are patriarchal Christian millennialists, the Taftâni are Arab-Persian spirit-masters, the Sisters are Pagan feminists, and the Wu Lung are Confucian aristocrats, the Alliance faces some vast ideological challenges. Still, so long as an atmosphere of mutual respect prevails, the Alliance could be a literal game-changer in the world of **Mage**.

Each Disparate group is a collection of survivors from a proud, respectable lineage – a bunch of folks whose cultures and practices withstand constant attack from the outside world. As such, they're insular and often paranoid, balancing trust and goodwill with treacherous history. When playing them, therefore, keep an eye on the shadows, puzzle your alliances out carefully, and recall that the path from past pain to future prosperity might be determined by the people you trust and the extent to which you trust them. This Alliance, then, is a delicate test of faith.

But then again, aren't they *all*...?

Potential Recruits

Beyond the five core members of the Alliance and its current associates, the Disparate Alliance has ties to other sects who might play a part in the faction's future plans:

- The *Balamob*, a group of Mayan jaguar-priests.
- The *Thunder Society*, a confederation of mystics from North American Native nations that want little or nothing to do with the Dreamspeaker Tradition.

- The *Uzoma*, Yoruban intercessors with the sacred spirits, whose Arts inspired the Bata'a.
- *Navalon*, a breakaway group of idealistic Technocrats who revere the example of King Arthur and despise the corruption of their previous Union.
- The *Mirainohmen*, or simply *Nohmen*, a sect of young Japanese technomystical tricksters who use psychic bonds with technological spirits in order to rearrange identities and undermine social preconceptions.
- The *Red Thorn Dedicants*, a sect of Lilithian mages whose practices make the Verbena and Cult of Ecstasy look tame.
- The *Itz'at*, a long-hidden sect of Mayan time-seers who mysteriously escaped notice for over 500 years.
- The *Go Kamisori Gama*, a clan of hypertech ninjas who have their own reasons for wanting to topple the Technocracy.

Although it's unlikely that all of these groups would join the alliance (or that certain Allies would ever endure their presence – especially in the case of the Red Thorn and Navalon), these sects, and others like them, have entered the Disparate orbit. They might not become full-fledged Allies, but there could be a roster of affiliates to call upon once the Disparate Alliance finally tips its hand to the other factions.

Secrecy: The Heart of the Alliance

Drawn as they are from specific cultures and subcultures, Disparate mages represent people who're typically ignored in the industrialized world. The foundation of the Allies and their people, then, comes from each group's particular culture, beliefs, agenda, and mystic practices. A Ngoma banker, for example, won't have much in common with a Hollower street kid beyond their new and potentially temporary Alliance. Each person will have individual needs, wants, and practices that depend more upon the person's Craft than upon the Alliance as a whole. For obvious reasons, this encourages them to be secretive, subtle, and elusive with regards to their existence and identity.

Survival might be the most important goal of all... which leads, by extension, to secrecy. The Alliance, remember, is a *SECRET*, its survival and prosperity linked to keeping that secret safe. A Hollow One might hang around her club of choice and probably admits to being a Darkling to those who know what such terms mean. (Assuming, of course, that the Hollow Ones didn't betray the Nine Traditions; if that *did* happen, then she's not even going to cop to that affiliation.) Still, she won't go bragging about her Allies among the Bata'a and so forth – that'd be a potential death sentence for those Allies and very probably for her as well. If the Technocracy has been gunning for Craft mages, the Alliance and its people will be keeping very low profiles, probably declaring themselves as members of other sects rather than their own.

Future Fates: Hollow Treachery?

According to certain sources, Horizon fell because an ambassador from the Hollow Ones led Technocratic forces into the Realm. Whether or not that accusation is true remains debatable even within **Mage** sourcebooks. Several **Revised**-era books make the claim, whereas others present the Hollow Ones as a harmless bunch of dissidents. So did the Darklings perform the greatest betrayal in Council history... and if so, was that the act of one treacherous individual, or was it part of a master plan on the Hollow Ones' behalf?

By now, you're probably familiar with the phrase "it's your call." In the case of this "Hollow treachery" element, though, it's a pretty significant decision. If the Darkling ambassador *did* cause Horizon to fall, then the Hollow Ones are targets for every Tradition mage with an understandable grudge... or they *will* be targets soon, if that betrayal has yet to be revealed. Should that be the case, the Disparate Alliance could find itself declared an enemy of the Council, even if most Disparates know nothing about Horizon or the attack.

As a Storyteller, you could have a monumental sword of Damocles hanging over the Disparates, just waiting for the moment when the Traditions discover the Hollow ambassador's betrayal. The Technocracy, too, might want to clean up loose ends by eliminating the Hollow Ones (and their allies) once and for all. Maybe that ambassador was actually a Hollow turncoat, betraying not only the Traditions but the Hollow Ones as well on behalf of the Nephandi. It could even have been a simple act of spite. Chances are, he was acting on his own... but perhaps he *wasn't*. Could the entire Horizon attack have been a plan to clear away the deadwood and leave room for the Disparate Alliance? Is the entire idea of Hollow treachery a rumor without substance... and even if it *is*, does anyone think the Traditions will just *ignore* the possibility that their Council was destroyed by the Hollow Ones? Not bloody likely.

Whether or not the accusation is true, the idea of Hollow treachery will certainly influence the other Disparates. After all, the Hollow Ones might betray them just as casually. If the truth remains unknown, then its revelation could tear the Alliance apart. If other Craft mages have heard the rumors (whether or not those tales are accurate), those rumors will probably color the mages' perception of the Hollow Ones in general. Maybe some folks felt it needed to be done; others, though, might be watching for a black-clad, trendy-looking knife in their backs, and they might have already planned accordingly...

Faced with the potential repercussions of Hollow treachery, the Storyteller has several options:

- **It happened:** The Hollow ambassador caused Horizon's fall, either on his own or on behalf of the group as a whole. Now the Hollow Ones are at war with Tradition mages, and the Disparate Alliance is a survival tactic. Maybe the truth has yet to come out, but the Hollow Ones are preparing for the inevitable retribution. Meanwhile, the Technocratic purge has been mowing down Disparates in an effort to find and kill the Hollow ambassador. Either now or in the very near future, the Hollow Ones and other Disparates face an open war with both the Traditions *and* Technocracy... a war possibly instigated by Nephandi, or perhaps kicked off by one man's careless treachery.
- **Rumors exist:** Conspiracy theories claim that the Hollow Ones were behind Horizon's fall, but most Tradition mages don't believe them. A few of them *might*, however, so the Disparate Alliance still serves as protective cover for the Hollow Ones. If something were to prove the rumors right, though, the war described above would certainly erupt. There's no way the Council would forgive a betrayal of that scale.
- **It never happened:** Either Horizon never fell, or it was attacked, but nothing ties the Hollow Ones to that invasion. The Traditions and Hollow Ones still get along as well as they always did, and the Disparate Alliance is just an attempt to protect unaligned mages from the Technocratic purge while also exposing the Nephandic infection within the Union itself.

Either way, the Disparate Alliance faces important conflicts, with some dramatic surprises perhaps waiting in its not-too-distant future...

And so, for the present at least, the Disparate Alliance remains a closely-guarded secret whose purpose might involve war against the Technocracy, Traditions, or both. The fractious nature of this Alliance, the essential secrecy of its existence, and the religious devotion inherent in several of its current Allies could make this a potentially explosive player in the hidden politics of the 21st-century world.

Ahl-i-Batin

Being everywhere yet nowhere is the key to hiding in plain sight

All things are connected, for all things are One. Though this world appears to be a rich pageant of people, places, creatures, and thoughts, those myriad elements are but mirrors and reflections of a greater Unity. When one realizes this fundamental truth, the Tapestry unfolds, responding to one's will. That Will and the Tapestry become One. This truth the Ahl-i-Batin have known since their beginnings on the legendary Night of Fana, when, in the midst of a terrible war, a faction of Akashayana came upon a group of *Darwushim* – dervishes – who were dancing and whirling in the moonlit night. On that night, the Brothers and the Darwushim danced together, forming a great mandala... and in the midst of that dance, an ancient consciousness Awakened.

Called the *Entelechy* by certain scholars, this consciousness was said to be comprised of the Ascended souls of mages who lived in an age before this one, mages who hoped to bring humanity into harmonious unity with the cosmos. As the Entelechy manifested into our chaotic world, it fragmented and dissolved. In so doing, it caused the Akashayana and the Darwushim dancing in the center to become a single entity that was neither one man nor the other. This was the *Kwajah-al-Akbar*, and as it spoke its mighty prophecy, those who danced around it were enlightened. Time ceased to be. Everyone upon that field became one with their partners in the dance – united in mind, body, and spirit.

When the Fana ended, all those who had been joined became individuals once again, forever transformed by their experience. Of what use were names? Of what importance country or kingdom when one understood the Unity of all things? The story of that night ends with these newborn souls forming a circle and dancing a spiral into its center, where, one by one, they disappeared. When these *Ahl-i-Batin* ("Subtle" or "Interior" Ones) re-emerged, their sole purpose was to continue the legacy of the great consciousness that now spoke in the voices of their Avatars. From the humblest hut to the grandest palaces, these mages used their Awakened magicks to bring about Unity for all mankind.

These are the myths surrounding the Batini. Such tales recall that once, not long ago, the Ahl-i-Batin sat upon the Council of Nine Traditions, occupying the Seat of Connection, as Correspondence was then called. People have said that the rise of the Technocratic Union spelled the end of the Subtle Ones, forcing them all into exile – hiding in the mysterious Realm of Mount Qaf, lost to time and obscurity. Everyone knows that.

And what everyone knows is false.

The Ahl-i-Batin never *went* anywhere. Rather, they went *everywhere*, leaving the turmoil of the Technocratic pogroms

Stereotypes

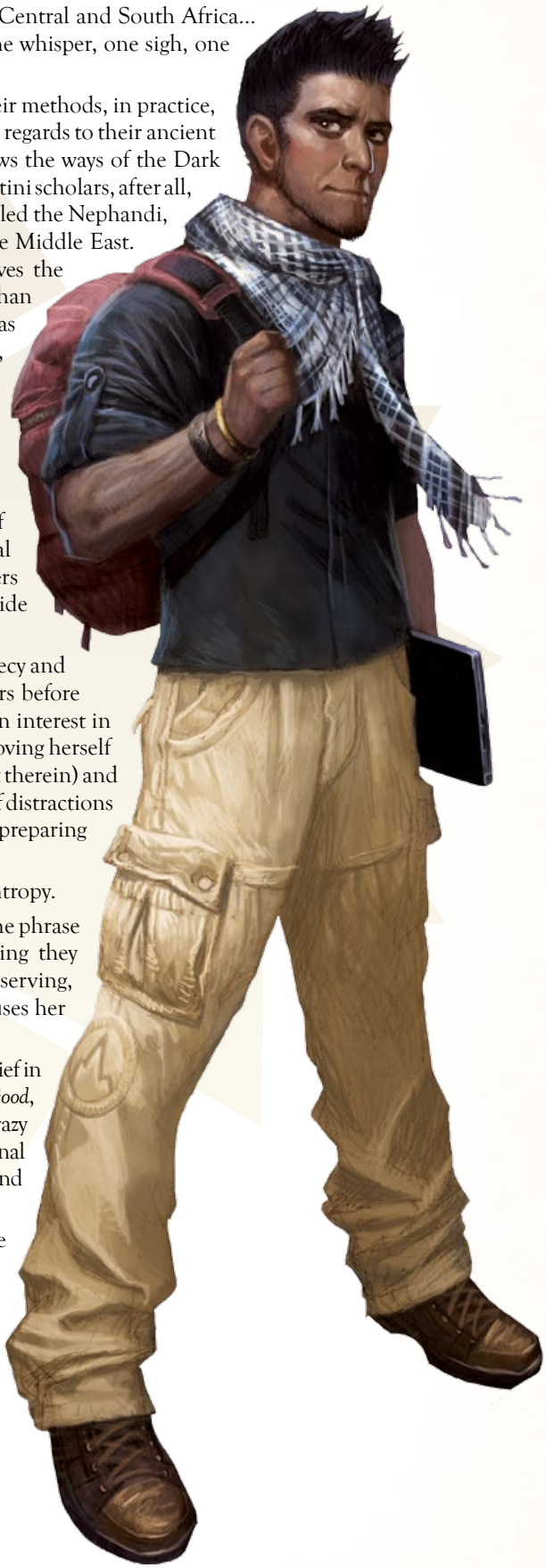
The Traditions: They refuse to see the connections between all things that make us One, and yet they believe themselves to be authorities on all things mystical!

The Technocracy: Riddled through with Nephandic corruption. Now, more than ever, we must crack their shell and purge their poisons.

The Disparates: Perhaps Unity will speak more clearly in disparate voices than it has in traditional ones!

in the Middle East to emerge in Europe, Asia, the Americas, Central and South Africa... always gently and softly bringing the world into Oneness – one whisper, one sigh, one leaf-fall at a time.

But although Batini ideals focus on Oneness and light, their methods, in practice, often take on the darker, bloodier cast of war – particularly with regards to their ancient fight against the Nephandi. It has been said that no one knows the ways of the Dark Mirrors, or battles them as assiduously, as the Batini do. It was Batini scholars, after all, who compiled the dreaded *Sebil-el-Mafouh Whash* that first detailed the Nephandi, and it was Batini Masters who drove the Devil Kings from the Middle East. Unfortunately, their deep connection to the Fallen also leaves the Subtle Ones far more susceptible to Nephandic corruption than they might be otherwise. Both groups could indeed be seen as opposite reflections of the same principle: all things are Unified, and thus all things remain bound... even light to darkness and oblivion to hope.



Organization: Unity emerges from structure; therefore, the Batini value order in their organization. There are five *khanates* in different parts of the world, each one presided over by a Master Murshid called a *Qtub*, or "pole." Each khanate is made up of about a dozen or so cabals composed of a few Murshids, several Murids, and 10 to 20 initiates. Each cabal knows that the others exist, but they rarely have contact with other Ahl-i-Batin outside their own immediate circle.

Initiation: Joining this sect requires equal amounts of secrecy and patience. Often, a candidate for initiation is observed for years before she's ever approached by a Murid. If the candidate expresses an interest in the Ahl-i-Batin, she undergoes a slow and steady process of removing herself from the world (and from the possessions and luxuries inherent therein) and adopting stringent levels of asceticism. This successive removal of distractions and temptations separates the initiate from ego and attachments, preparing her to embrace the greater freedom of Unity.

Affinity Sphere: Correspondence or Mind – but *never* Entropy.

Focus: As their name declares, the Batini remain subtle. The phrase "leave no trace" holds a particularly significance in everything they do. A Batini mage often spends weeks, months, even *years* observing, considering, and contemplating a situation before she finally uses her Arts to nudge things in the desired direction.

Faith is an essential element of Batini practices, with a core belief in *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*. Certain Batini assert that *It's All Good*, and others hold the bleak conviction that *Everything's an Illusion*. Crazy wisdom, alchemy, and High Ritual Magick maintain their traditional places in Batini Arts, with yoga, gutter magick, reality hacking, and even chaos magick appearing in the practices of certain devotees.

Despite their mystic acumen, Batini cannot learn the Entropy Arts at all. This mystic blind spot presents an interesting conundrum: if all things are Unified, then surely even decay has a place in that sacred order? That's a question the sect has not yet answered.

BATA'A

Where there's faith and passion, freedom finds a way.

From deep within the bayous of Louisiana and the Mississippi backwaters, spirit drums sound the pulse of hungry life. Pounding like thousands of racing hearts, they echo with the ghosts of ancient natives and murdered slaves. Louder and louder, they shout out one to another, resounding across the islands of the Caribbean and down into Central and South America – harbingers of wild, blessed ecstasy and the wet, red work of bitterness and revenge.

Named for the spirit drums held sacred by Caribbean cultures, the mages who call themselves *Bata'a* possess the unique power to simultaneously stir the souls of men to the heights of love and grateful awe and to plunge them into depths of horrified agony. Largely misunderstood or misrepresented by outsiders, these practitioners of Voudoun, Candomblé, and even Spanish Catholicism trace their descent back to seven African tribes enslaved to work the farms and plantations of the New World. As the old ghosts tell it, these slaves brought their own spirits and traditions with them, only to find common interest and customs with the native Carib and Arawak islanders. Over time, these cultures blended, incorporating Catholicism into their own magical spiritualism. The result produced a new society, both mundane and magickal, that empowered the slaves in certain places like Barbados, Bermuda, and Haiti to overthrow their false masters and exact revenge for those murdered in the struggle.

Though their homelands have been ravaged by conquest, slavery, piracy, war, corruption, disaster, and poverty, the Bata'a still keep faith with in *Les Invisibles*: the powerful spirits who permeate the land and its people. These folk revere, worship, and serve *Les Mysteres* – also called the *Loa* or *orishas* – and attribute their magickal abilities and powers to them... and *only* them. "Magick" comes through communion – a respectful exchange of powers and offerings. For the Bata'a, either you believe in the holy rites or you can count yourself amongst *les idiots*, the fools who dismiss or trivialize the spirits and their Arts.

Beyond the silly stereotypes of "voodoo" lies a survivor's creed of reverent assimilation. Bata'a make the best of whatever they have to work with: French saints, African gods, Germanic hexes, Spanish goods, Native spirits, and the heartbeat of the people, mirrored in the drums, a pulse that cannot be stilled by any force on Earth. It's this heartbeat that gives the sect its name, and it's that defiance that gives the Bata'a their independence. For though they might strike alliances with the Verbena and Dreamspeaker Traditions, bond with Hollow Ones, and even tolerate the presence of crusty old Crusaders, these mystics are ultimately their own people. Even their ties the Loa are based on mutual respect, not abject servitude.

Organization: A deliberately informal sect, the Bata'a work mostly on a local level, with few titles beyond *mae-de-santos* (momma saint) and *pae-de-santos* (papa saint), both given to

Stereotypes

The Traditions: Useful allies, but too devoted to their own interests to be reliable friends for ours.

The Technocracy: Pretty new chains, same old slavers.

The Disparate Alliance: Our allies understand the weight of someone's boot on your neck. Still, too many of them would become conquerors if they could... and some of them have been conquerors before. A useful alliance for now, but not one I think will last.

respected members. Because Bata'a don't discriminate between hedge wizards and true mages, the group enjoys an incredibly large membership drawn from related faiths throughout the world. *Ronde des Ames* – the "Chain of Souls" – unites all localized links into a spiritual network; tied together by gossip, spirit messengers, and – these days – phone calls and the Internet, these links circulate information, rituals, and news. In the early 21st century, the Chain sustains a growing political activism. Though the Bata'a once focused on the seven *Rangi* ("colors," or families) and localized *Marassas* (male-female partnerships, representing the father and mother figures of a given group), the sect now pursues a more unified global agenda. Especially since the Technocratic purge and the dreadful *Tempéte* – the Avatar Storm – Bata'a now recognize that division means extinction… or, as history has shown, even worse.

Initiation: In order to be considered for membership, a person must be truly devoted to the Loa. This candidate must seek out a known member of the Bata'a and petition him for instruction. Very often, especially for white students, this request isn't granted unless the would-be initiate has connections or introductions through reputable sources. Once accepted, the candidate pledges to sacrifice all her time and money for a year in service to her teacher and the Craft. At the end of that time, if she shows talent, devotion, and common sense, she becomes a *hounsis* (initiate) and begins to learn about *Les Invisibles*, leading up to her first possession. Following a lengthy seclusion of prayers, fasts, and purification, the initiate receives a potent mixture of alcohol and hallucinogenic herbs and left to the mercy of *Les Mysteres*. If she survives, she becomes Bata'a.

Affinity Spheres: Spirit or Life.

Focus: Based in the sublime union between flesh and spirit, Bata'a Arts require two things: a ritual calling upon Legba, the guardian of crossroads; and a rite designed to induce a trance state and open channels between minds, bodies, and spirits. In certain cases, a practitioner may choose to create a *gris-gris*: an item blessed by and infused with the energy of a Loa. Such items are used only in cases of dire urgency and limited time. Faith is the heart of this invisible family, with common paradigms insisting that *Creation's Alive*, *Everything is Chaos*, and this *World of Gods and Monsters* demands good friends and willing allies.

Voudoun, faith, medicine-work, craftwork, High Ritual, and crazy wisdom form the core practices within the Bata'a. Some members also favor gutter magick, shamanism, weird science, dominion, maleficia, and various martial arts. One works with whatever's available. So long as the spirits are served respectfully, a practitioner can rely upon them to aid her.

Children of Knowledge

I've been the egg, I've been the shit, and now I'm reaching for the gold.

"*Better living through chemistry!*" Once, that phrase epitomized the potential and promise of nuclear power, plastic polymers, and a host of brave new products guaranteed to make life easier and better. For most Awakened folks, it's one of the most insidious catch-phrases ever coined by Technocratic propagandists. Even so, other mages know it in its original form: *Unus es ab arte transcendit; est transcendens omnia per artem*: "By the Art, one transcends; through the Art, all is transcendent."

Throughout their long history, the Children – better known by their preferred title, the *Solificati* – have worked toward a singular, shining goal: enlightenment and Ascension through the ancient Arts and Sciences of Alchemy. Although people have practiced forms of alchemy as far back as the Sumerian era, most of these self-styled Crowned Ones trace their history to the ancient Egyptian court of Queen Hatshepsut. There, the great Queen's cupbearers learned the secrets of the universe as revealed through alchemy, and they pledged to share those mysteries only with the worthiest of souls. In this way, the Solificati grew in number, travelling throughout Persia and North Africa, down the Silk Road to India and China, practicing mainly in small and solitary groups until they formally banded into an alchemist's guild at the first gathering of what would become the Order of Reason.

Unfortunately, the alchemists soon realized that the Order was, shall we say, less than hospitable to their cause. The resulting false starts, purges, and dissolution echoed the various stages of alchemy – most notably *putrefaction*, the stage of decay that precedes renewal. Reforming under the Hermetic aegis in 1445, the Solificati became one of the original Nine Traditions. Soon, though, the scandal involving the Great Betrayer shattered the group's unity once again. History reports that, in the aftermath of Heylel's execution, the Solificati disbanded in disgrace and faded into the mists of time. As is usually the case with such claims of historical fact, the truth follows a different path. Ebb and flow, rise and retreat have marked the Solificati way since that group's inception. That mass disappearance was just one more turning of a familiar cycle.

When the Solificati reemerged in the late 1950s – this time called the Children of Knowledge – their Art involved a potent new substance: LSD. Whether Dr. Alfred Hoffman and his team were true Children of Knowledge or simply chemists influenced by their discoveries, lysergic acid diethylamide heralded a radical new message: through alchemy (now called chemistry), the mind could open and the Masses could Ascend. The newer breed of Crowned Ones hustled this compound out among the Masses – sometimes wisely, often not. The predictable backlash blunted the compound's potential benefits, but "the doors of perception" had been opened and could not easily be shut again.

Stereotypes

The Traditions: We tried to show them Unity. They threw us out. Screw 'em. We've got better things to think about... and to *do*.

The Technocracy: Their version of Unity is fucked up, evil, manipulative, and sad.

The Disparates: Our new companions have the kind of vision that comes only through perseverance against adversity. Yeah, we know a thing or two about that.

This psychotropic method remains controversial even within the group. Once again, the Solificati split into factions. Some wound up joining the Order of Hermes in the late 1990s, whereas others jostled for their rightful title like former bandmates quarreling over the old band's name. By the new millennium, two different groups had assumed the same confusing moniker – the Children growing tired of that diminutive name and the Crowns annoyed by the careless experiments and excesses of their peers. Both groups now claim the Solificati title, each one refusing to acknowledge those other idiots as the rightful heirs to that name.

Today's Children of Knowledge are less likely to work alone in isolated candle-lit cells crammed with books, papers, and bizarre alchemical equipment, and far more inclined to form university research teams, think-tanks, psychotropic occultist sects, and club-going exploration groups. The last 25 years have seen these alchemists spread their chemical gospel through rave culture, neotribal spirit festivals, and the global adventures of nation-hopping neogypsy tribes. "*At play in the fields of the mind*," they pursue the roles of chemical tricksters in whose hands the illusions of the real world get broken, scattered, and rearranged to form new and entertaining pictures. These Children get pretty serious about their play, though, and those new pictures include new visions for reality.

Organization: As they have since the group's inception, Solificati prefer to gather in small groups centered upon one or two Master Alchemists, two or three Adepts, and a handful of potential apprentices. The Masters set the agendas for study and activity, the Adepts refine the process, and the apprentices learn through practice, trial, and error. Academic study is crucial and secrecy even more so. Given their rough histories with both the Traditions and the Technocracy, this group has every right to feel paranoid. Perhaps this Disparate Alliance will finally provide security for the group's ongoing Great Work.

Initiation: To shake off their scientific preconceptions, newly Awakened Solificati (called "eggs," in reference to the alchemical symbol for gestation) begin their training with the time-honored task of transforming base metals into silver or gold. Once she's successfully completed this task, the egg gets tested by her Master to see if she understands the lesson behind the chore. The correct answer, of course, is that *she* is the base material and that gold symbolizes her ultimate potential.

Affinity Spheres: Traditionally Matter, though some groups prefer Forces, Prime, or Entropy.

Focus: Because the universe is one huge symphony of vibrating energy, magick is simply the application of one's Will to influence and change the vibrations between one thing and another. The tools that symbolize and channel those vibrations – and that rearrange the perceptions of a viewer so that he can retune his own expectations about what is and is not possible – make such Greater Alchemy possible.

To a Child of Knowledge, *Everything is Data*, *Chaos*, or an *Illusion, Prison, or Mistake*. Knowledge – honed through alchemy, craftwork, crazy wisdom, the Art of Desire, chaos magick, and occasional hypertech – confers the truth behind life's illusions. Magick, to a Solificatus, is the Art of Transmutation; it changes, refines, breaks down, and reassembles existing materials into newly formed energies.

Hollow Ones

Ours is a strange and beautiful weirdness.

A hollow age makes hollow people. In many regards, the 20th century was that age – filled with sound and fury but very little depth below its rather spectacular surface. The term "lost generation" was coined to reflect the wild rush of indulgence and abandon that epitomized the early part of that century, and though the Hollow Ones are anything but lost, that phrase echoes their questing Path.

Dismissed as a bunch of shallow club-kids, the Darklings are as old as humanity. Where other mages sought enlightenment, the hollow people explored shadows. The heirs of Lilith and Lucifer, they found power in rebellion, not submission. It's not surprising, then, that they were, until recently, a rare and haunted breed.

The group's modern incarnation traces its roots to the Romantic Rebellion of the early 1800s, when artists like Byron, Beethoven, Goya, and the Shelleys spit in the face of that Age of Reason, exposing the tempestuous intersection of nature and humanity. Their inheritors, the Decadents, reveled in debauchery, seeking wisdom in excess. In those days of open-eyed madness, the Hollow Ones found inspiration. Although the group's familiar name and purpose came together several decades later, that pursuit of clarity through glorious paradox remains a foundation of the sect. "We are," quoted Darkling icon Neville Sinclair, "the Hollow Men. We have always been here."

Regardless of the name they've chosen, the Hollow Ones specialize in revealing truths that other folks would rather ignore. Their ironic embrace of morbidity is a pose meant to highlight the importance of life. A living *memento mori*, this group kicks over monuments in order to show the rot underneath... and thus, to also demonstrate the importance of living life well. Art, poetry, dance, imagination... such things are sacraments to the Hollow Ones, not simply because it's fun but because of the truth embodied in artistry. Art, at its best, distills passions into symbols other people can understand. *Real* art – not the hollow confections of pop culture but the deeper levels, where truth comes out – is a form of magick. And although other groups employ that focus too, no sect understands this form better than the Hollow Ones.

Though they've shared space with other sects for over a century now, the Hollowers rarely get the respect they've earned. Most other mages see them as dilettantes, capering around the club-scene like spoiled children while their elders do the heavy lifting. That's an unfair assessment, though understandable at times. In reality, the Darklings focus on Earthly matters that their oh-so-cosmic peers ignore. Especially since the explosion of subcultures in the post-WWII era, Hollow mages have concentrated on the young people caught out on the fringes of their world: the misfits, the freaks, the left-behinders whose oddness strands them, as Patti Smith put it, "outside of society."

Stereotypes

The Traditions: We gave them a chance – *lots* of chances, actually. They blew us off, so fuck 'em. We got a new ball and we're playing a new game.

The Technocracy: The rotten core of a rotting age.

The Disparate Alliance: Is it perfect? Hell no. Is it an *improvement*? Damn straight.

Other sects might show up at homeless shelters with some gifts and a sermon, but Hollowers speak the language of the streets. Like the cast-off items from which they shape their Arts, these mages reclaim life's throwaways and make something beautiful from them.

Organization: Traditionally, the Darklings favor small, family-like cliques; within these groups, social acclaim and stigma keep the members of that group in line. Given the dangerous nature of their world, these cliques prize loyalty and punish betrayal with all the harshness of the streets. The rules within such groups are simple: *don't fuck each other over, respect one another's autonomy, and remain beautiful in the face of ugliness.*

Until recently, the Hollowers were considered the lost Tradition; they had even considered, and been considered for, a 10th seat on the Council of Nine. Those plans fell apart when various catastrophes shook the Council. Hollow elders, disgusted with the constant games of make-nice, decided that the Traditions were a lost cause. Although some Hollow Ones joined the Verbena, Ecstatics, or even the Etherites, the majority decided to ditch their Council aspirations. The talks that seeded the Disparate Alliance proved instrumental in that decision... and now the Darklings – rebel tribes by nature – are adjusting to the idea of being leaders instead of malcontents.

Initiation: Though they're typically associated with the Goth-rock subculture, Hollow Ones gravitate toward any fashion steeped in beautiful revolt. Punk, metal, hip-hop, techno-industrial, and even classical music cultures have adherents among the Hollow Ones. Most recently, the neo-jazz, steampunk, fae-punk, Gothic Lolita, and androgynous *visual kei* subcultures have rattled the old Bauhaus-style cage. Even so, many Hollowers still enjoy the old-school Goth look, if only because it's so unfashionable these days.

An element of grace must *always* be present in Darkling company. When an appropriately graceful member gets noticed, a clique begins to test his fitness to join the club. From a discreet distance, they prod him and watch how he responds. Assuming that he passes their tests, they approach the potential member with offers of friendship. If he seems cool, he's allowed further and further into the clique until the members judge him fit to join... by which point he's usually a member by default.

Affinity Spheres: Any.

Focus: Darklings use whatever they've got to work with – typically things discarded by society. Broken toys, occult goodies, and symbols and behaviors that so-called respectable people shun make potent tools in the hands of a Hollow mage. Belief-wise, that hollow image is appropriately symbolic: these folks tend to see themselves as vessels of life and death, pouring their Arts out or carrying those cosmic forces from place to place. Magick, then, comes from the proper comprehension and intentional use of the energies that, in most people, are simply wasted. *Everything is Chaos, an Illusion, or a Mistake*, probably on a *One-Way Trip to Oblivion*. Some Hollowers insist that *It's All Good*, but they're the minority. Chaos and gutter magick are near-universal among the Hollow Ones. Although such Arts don't actually *nurture* chaos, they thrive in the chaos of our age.

KOPA LOEI

To fight sharks, you must breathe the water without drowning first.

In the days before the pristine white sands of Waikiki were ever dimmed with the shadows of resort hotels or dirtied with the cigarette butts and garbage of millions of tourists, the land of Hawai'i and the far-flung islands of the Polynesian peoples belonged to the Kopa Loei. These wizard-priests, called *kanakakahuna*, used their Arts to bind themselves to the land and ensure its fertility through rituals meant to honor the native gods, preserving the balance between the natural world and the needs of the people. Some amongst them used their powers to navigate the vast expanses of the Pacific, connecting the islands and their people into one large extended family. Above all, the sacred laws of *kapu* ensured that the land thrived... and that the Kopa Loei retained their power.

When mages from the mainlands – now called *ha'ole kahuna*, or "chiefs of Those-Not-Us" –invited the Kopa Loei to join in their pale Council, they were politely rebuffed. What had the kahuna to fear from these *Tupa Nui*, the Great Builders from across the seas? Much more than they realized. Advance scouts from the Odyssean branch of the Daedalean Explorators sent back reports of rich paradises inhabited by (as they saw it) primitive savages. Using an age-old trick, these *haka'uhane* ("empty souls") impersonated the Polynesian god, Lono, whose standard was a tall cross-pole hung with long banners of white cloth. The rest, as they say, is history.

As with so many civilizations that got "civilized" by their invaders, the Polynesians and their cousins throughout the islands fell to disease, servitude, and cultural conquest. Old ways retreated before convenience and Christianity. Today's Kopa Loei – what few of them remain – are no longer the kings and nobles of the past, nor are they the rulers and keepers of island life. Centuries of Technocratic rule have seen to that. However, those handfuls of kanakahuna and their kin who still live in the Hawai'ian archipelago have managed to keep a strong grasp upon the traditions and rituals that sustained them for centuries before the arrivals of the *ha'oles* (Those-Not-Us, derived from a word meaning "those without breath"). Although the tourist and military trades have ravaged some of the most sacred and beautiful portions of the islands, modern Kopa Loei still manage to carve out places of their own, free from ha'ole developers and New Age tourists. There, they work to replenish and rebalance the *mana*, preserve the flora and wildlife, and create communities where kanaka – Sleeping and Awakened alike – can live as they did in the times before. Such communities, and the laws of *kapu* that govern them, are essential to the future of the people. As *Ke aka nui* ("the Great Shadows," a.k.a. Nephandi) spread their poison across

Stereotypes

The Traditions: No wonder the ha'ole kahuna are scattered, divided, and struggling to survive. With no kapu to guide their war with the Tupa Nui, they fight with blunted weapons.

The Technocracy: The Tupa Nui? We know them far too well. Liars and destroyers, they and the *Ke aka nui*, the Great Shadows, have become one and the same.

The Disparate Alliance: Ha'ole kahuna, to be sure, but at least they aren't trying to tell us what to do or steal our land and way from us. They fight the *Ke aka nui* as we do, and so, for now, they are friends.

the world, the Kopa Loei, guided by the resurgence of their *Kahuna-nui* oracles and seers, prepare for battle… not only with the Tupa Nui usurpers, but with the Great Shadows whose shark-like hungers will end only with oblivion.

Organization: Kopa Loei gather into loose collections of *kadugos* (groupings of blood-kin) with anywhere from two to 20 members in a given group. A *kupuna* (elder or mentor) teaches his or her *keiki* (child), and while these aren't "official" titles, those terms are recognized as primary foundations of Kopa Loei hierarchy. Within the group, all kanaka receive respect. The Kopa Loei don't acknowledge nonsense about "awakening"; certain kanakakahunas are simply more attuned and powerful than others are.

Kopa Loei follow three traditional specialities: the *ali'i*, wizard-priests who bond with the Land and specialize in Prime; the *kahuna*, mage-shamans who work with a variety of Arts; and the often-female *he ho'okele moana* ("wayfinders"), who navigate the open oceans and connect the various islands and underwater strongholds of the kanaka maoli. In the past, the ali'i commanded the greatest respect, with a system of religious rules (*kapu*) to maintain the fertility and prosperity of the land and to underscore the deference due to these leaders. Kahuna, also, were treated with reverence, and wayfinders (Awakened or not) occupied the lowest level of respect. These days, however, those he ho'okele moana command far more respect, thanks to their abilities to find unspoiled islands in the heavily exploited Pacific.

Initiation: Unlike other Traditions or Disparate groups, the Kopa Loei treat the initiation of their new *ho'omaka* as a private affair between each individual kupuna and keiki. Potential students and initiates are exclusively native islanders – no ha'oles allowed! – who've been selected through their participation in political events, islander social media, and recommendations by other members of their kadugo. Whatever her origins, a potential candidate must be able to sing her *kanaenae* (adulation prayer to the gods), proving her connections to the Polynesian people.

Affinity Spheres: Kopa Loei don't believe in spheres. Game-wise, their Sphere Traits depend on the things they do, not on training given by the group.

Focus: Ho'omana flows through connection with nature, sacred intentions, and purity of self. For this reason, Kopa Loei do not, for any reason, use what they would consider unnatural or technological tools to work their magic. *Creation's Divine and Alive*, split between *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*. Careless, flashy magic disrupts and harms the balance of the natural pathways – *kapuhuna* – and it often angers the gods. In all things, balance with nature and blessings from the gods are essential.

NGOMA

Gold is merely dirt that shines.
To be enlightened, you must become the sun.

Storytellers of old wove yarns of clever animals living and thriving within the vast and beautiful African landscape, puzzling out the riddles of life, the universe, and the many worlds that exist within it. Those tales became a symbolic method through which the Ngoma – the great scholar-wizard-priests of the Central African nations – shared the knowledge they had discovered. Though such stories, the people, and the landscape have changed, the work of the Ngoma is much the same as it has always been: observation, contemplation, education, and rejuvenation.

Originating in the ancient rituals of Nubia and Egypt, this venerable sect began as the *Ngo-Ami*, wizard-priests of Classical Africa. But as Romans, Persians, and Muslims pushed their empires into Nubia, the Ngo-Ami took their Arts and migrated further into the African interior, eventually taking on the name *Ngoma*. There, they prospered; during medieval Europe's Dark Ages, the African kingdoms enjoyed a now-lost golden age. At the height of the age, the Ngoma served as counselors to great rulers, as healers, priests, teachers, and philosophers. So great was their renown that they caught the attention of European magi, who invited them to the Grand Convocation. Alas, prejudice and privilege blocked the Ngoma's recognition as equals on par with the Hermetics or the Solificati. Lumped in with the rest of the shamans and spirit speakers, the offended Ngoma withdrew from this Council that preferred to integrate them into the Dreamspeakers rather than offer them their own Tradition.

As history tells us, the resulting years were harsh. Slavers pushed into Africa's interior, devastating its cultures to feed an inexhaustible lust for slaves. The Ngoma saw their schools and cities, lands, and peoples exploited and decimated by plague, starvation, and war. Cities fell, bloodlines were severed, and ancient ways (and the secret languages that conveyed them) were all but lost. Yet, as the Ngoma now see things, those holocausts became a refining fire – a lesson in humility and gratitude for a sect that had, for most of its existence, been revered as something akin to the divine. The old ceremonies and rituals – now held in even higher regard simply because enough wizard-priests survived to perform them – took on greater meaning and significance. The preservation of knowledge, as well as the gathering of it, became a much higher priority. And from all those terrible years, the Ngoma learned to recognize – as they never had before – the telltale signs of corruption.

Aside from a small contingent among the Houses of Hermes, the Ngoma have been considered lost. Such misconceptions fit their purposes. Rather than preserving some dated reenactment of their ancient form, they are now what they were in the classical era: urbane sophisticates of their age. These millennial Ngoma have proven to be excellent

Stereotypes

The Traditions: If they had not let their prejudices blind them, we might have become powerful allies. Then again, perhaps the Ancestors' foresight beheld the Council's current wretched state.

The Technocracy: Destroyers, desecrators, murderers, and exploiters.

The Disparate Alliance: Such a diverse group of potential allies! At the very least, we might learn their secrets and profit from their lore.

students and frugal stewards of the Arts that have been passed down to them. Fiercely aware that the lineage of traditional magick in Central Africa might have vanished without the valiant efforts of their ancestors, they have big ideas for the future of their rich and varied continent. Today's Ngoma enjoy respect as professors, doctors, scientists, astrologers, and the like, but they also serve the people as astrophysicists, politicians, architects, financiers, and philanthropists.

Organization: Those Ngoma who survived the scourges of the slave trade and colonial exploitation re-established the magickal schools for which they were renowned. Out of necessity, these schools remain more hidden than they used to be in the old days. Because the Ngoma recognize the importance of preserving their devastated knowledge, rituals, and traditions, these schools now span the globe, providing essential training in a wide variety of magickal practices: spirit speech, herb work, spellcrafting, storytelling, and geomancy.

As with most elements of African culture, elders instruct their younger initiates. Age and experience remain prized attributes within Ngoma society. An elder *Kitjito* ("Oasis") provides instruction to his *kuwaneko* ("thirsty one," as in "thirsty for knowledge"), providing lessons in magick, science, African history and lore, and the ancient languages of Nubian arcana – most especially *Ufungoto*, the "Key-Tongue" in which spirits are said to speak. *Kitujita* often send their *kuwanakada* off to study with other elders too, conferring a wide range of disciplines and specialties. As with Hermetic magi, knowledge and scholarship are essential elements of Ngoma training. Ngoma believe that a wide vessel holds more water, so a broad range of knowledge confers a greater range of possibilities.

Initiation: Within the African continent, a newly Awakened mage might locate a Ngoma school all by himself; outside Africa, a potential initiate generally needs to find (or be found by) a Kitjito, who begins his initial training and then refers him to a school... often paying the entrance and travel fees herself so that the kuwaneko can concentrate on his studies without worrying about finances. Training typically involves years of study and includes vision quests and magickal ordeals. Non-Awakened students who display exceptional potential are encouraged to learn as much as possible; even if such a student never Awakens, he might find a place within the vast secret support networks upon which the Ngoma rely.

Affinity Spheres: Life, Mind, Prime, or Spirit.

Focus: Knowledge unlocks the various chambers of Art and possibility. Because spirits and departed Ancestors provide answers for many secrets, outsiders often mistake the Ngoma for shamans. This is not the case; the spirits offer guidance, but the knowledge and the Arts depend upon each Ngoma, not upon Otherworldly favors.

Guided by paradigms of *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos* where *Tech Holds All Answers*, Ngoma employ High Ritual Magick with a deep component of faith and modern applications of alchemy, hypertech, medicine-work, craftwork, reality hacking, and hypereconomics and its associated Art of Desire. Although some Ngoma choose to work with the traditional tools of their Ancestors, most *Suktamke* ("those who provide a push") employ a mix of ancient and technological tools. Knowledge, after all, is not bound to a single era.

Orphans

My life, my soul, my magic – MY CHOICE!

Awakening is older than tradition. Long before occult societies appeared to guide and protect their mages, people with talent simply shaped their own Paths. Some gathered together for mutual benefit, whereas others made shit up as they went along. In Ascension War terms, such people are considered *Orphans*: poor little mages with no home to speak of.

"Orphan" is a derogatory term used by Tradition mages to describe people who use magick without their enlightened guidance. In Trad jargon, that term is typically capitalized. Folks who actually *are* orphans, however, often dislike that term... and for good reason. The idea that someone's an orphan unless they're part of your specific family implies a paternalistic sense of ownership that drives many orphans straight up a goddamned tree. And so, these so-called "orphans: rarely use that term among themselves unless they're being sarcastic with some Tradition jackass.

(As far as the Technocracy's concerned, *all* mystic mages are Reality Deviants, to be converted when possible and destroyed when necessary.)

Technically speaking, an orphan can be someone's who's self-Awakened, defecting from an official group, or belonging to a smaller sect that's not part of the more notable factions. The Disparate Alliance cheerfully adds such mages to their ranks when and if an orphan wants some company. These mages make up a fairly large percentage of the Disparate membership... such as it is, anyway. Although orphan is not a sect *per se*, there are plenty of orphans within the Disparate Alliance, neither claiming nor claimed by a particular sect.

For mages who prefer to make their own destiny, or who want nothing to do with the Ascension War, an orphan Path provides an independent option. Plenty of mages who've never even *heard* of this Ascension War qualify as orphans by default... and plenty of people who *do* know of it prefer to remain independent. An orphan makes her own decisions, determines her own practices, believes what she chooses to believe, and avoids the political bullshit that comes with membership in some larger group.

That said, the orphan road is a very hard Path, especially for those mages who Awaken – as many do – with a blast of ***wild talent*** (see Chapter Ten, pp. 527-528). When Awakening strikes a teenager, that kid usually hits the streets in a panic. Many orphans call this trauma *the Plunge*, *the Vortex*, or *Wintershine*: a cataclysm that tips the floor sideways and send them headlong into Wonderland. In the wake of that experience, the terrified

Stereotypes

(Assuming that the orphan has even heard of these groups... which is unlikely.)

The Traditions: A bunch of self-righteous wizards who not only believe they hung the moon but also insist that you have to hang there with it.

The Technocracy: Fuck that bunch of oppressive evil bastards!

The Disparate Alliance: I'm kinda reserving judgment on the groups I know of, but they seem to have a better handle on things than those other folks do.

orphan usually bolts... and then tries to learn how to survive in a world where the previous rules of reality no longer apply. Yeah, sure – there's power. But newborn mages don't know how to use that power unless they find someone to teach them. Without a mystic society or Technocratic indoctrination, those folks tend to wind up puzzling things out for themselves by joining small sects, cults, or gangs. Some end up perishing in spectacular Paradox backlashes, attacks by rival mage groups, or the many other perils of a world in darkness.

Organization: Typically, an orphan either practices by himself or belongs to a small group. Again, there's no common thread between such groups. One might be a rock band, another a church choir, a third could be a witch family, and a fourth might read Tarot cards in a graveyard each Saturday night. As usual, elders tend to dominate the group; in this case, though, the word "elder" is defined more by mystic accomplishment or personal charisma than by age or an appointed title.

Leaders within an orphan sect can be brilliant, brutal, seductive, or persuasive. One could dominate his tribe through sex, drugs, and occult babble, and another might have a knack for scamming free meals at the homeless shelter. With few exceptions, the group's rules depend upon a leader's whims and his ability to enforce them within that group.

Initiation: In the old days, most societies had initiatory rites that ushered people into adulthood, a trade, or a mystic pursuit. Guided by elders, the initiates would learn the things they needed to know in order to function in that new capacity. Magickal and spiritual initiations were part of most pre-industrial societies, and some of those groups became (or joined) the Traditions and Crafts we know today. Certain regions still have such groups today, but they're hard to find in the industrialized world.

More often, an orphan mage winds up meeting other folks like himself... usually among street cultures, neotribalists, transhumanists, fantasy fans, New Agers, occult groups, and so on. Thus, initiation can be an exceedingly mixed affair, based more upon the people in charge of the group than upon any shared formalities. Typically, the orphan has to prove herself trustworthy, swear some level of allegiance to the group and its leaders, and demonstrate her skills in service to that group. Consequently, an orphan might wind up in a fringe Christian enclave, a Satanic coven, a Burning Man art collective, a pack of vagabond street kids, a New Age ashram, or any other group that holds a place for people who believe in magic.

Affinity Spheres: Any.

Focus: Orphans accept almost any worldview that provides a place for magickal powers. Some orphans become technomancers too, focusing their Arts through technological tools and beliefs. Religious creeds, transhumanist philosophy, occult dabbling, and ethnic practices provide the most common focuses for orphan magick, and popular culture that integrates several of them (often known as "gutter magick" or "high eclecticism") is especially prevalent in the technological world.

Sisters of Hippolyta

It's a shame to miss seeing the people who need help. It's a crime to see them and do nothing.

Why is God so often considered a man? What happened to reverence for the female – or for that space between polarities where there's room enough for everyone? It's a clichéd question, yet no less valid for its overuse. What the hell is *up* with constant, pervasive denigration of mothers, lovers, sisters, daughters, friends? Why are so many people still terrified by the idea of female power? The Sisters have been asking that question for over 2000 years, and the world still hasn't answered it to their satisfaction.

Sacred warriors of life, the Sisters of Hippolyta (more commonly, *Sisters* or *Hippolytoi*) trace their origins to the legendary Amazons. Fed up with the violence directed at their sex, these women isolated themselves from those people, male or female, who would not respect them. Yet despite their ferocious reputation, these women often *did* love and bond with men. Hippolyta herself – the fiercest member of a warlike people – was supposedly so impressed with Herakles that she gave him her prized possession: a girdle passed down from her father, Ares, symbolizing prowess with craft and war. But one of the hero's companions, Theseus – overcome with desire – took Hippolyta back to Athens to be his... er, "wife."

The Amazons set out to retrieve Hippolyta. According the Sisters' version of the legend, the warriors fought Theseus and his Athenians to a standstill but failed to rescue Hippolyta. Many of the warriors perished. With their queen in sight but their strength flagging, one Amazon loosed an arrow into Hippolyta's breast. The legend reinforces a core belief: bondage is anathema. If a sister gets captured, her conclave will risk everything to win her release – even if the only possible escape is extinction. *Death over slavery* has been their creed since the very beginning. And although the Sisters forged their new fellowship (literally, some myths claim) from the ashes and bones of their warlike society, the option of force has always been regarded as a necessary tool of peace.

First and foremost, however, the Sisters hold a reverence for life – though that life must also be free, not abused or enslaved. Historically, they've been healers, liberators, and advocates for women and children around the world. Nonaggression provides a key to the group's beliefs... although *defensive* violence is, by their definition, not aggressive. Mutual respect is essential as well, although like most ideals, it's more difficult to uphold in real life.

Given their focus on the Divine Feminine and the Arts of Life, many people wonder why this Craft didn't merge with the Verbena long ago. Traditionally, though, the Sisters avoid collaboration (much less alliance) with other sects because such efforts often come back to bite them. Recent events, though, have changed the situation. As all struggles do, the Ascension War has left behind casualties and wreckage... and in the

Stereotypes

The Traditions: Well-intentioned, maybe, but treacherous and lost.

The Technocracy: If Patriarchy had a face, it would look like a machine... specifically, *this* machine.

The Disparates: I've got doubts – *LOTS* of doubts. Still, maybe we can learn something from this bunch of boys' clubs... or teach them... or at least limit the damage they'll do otherwise. And if not, we'll do what we've always done before: disappear.

wake of the 20th century, such casualties and wreckage are higher than usual. Beyond the obvious damage to the Awakened community, the massive shifts of that century have unearthed new possibilities of gender and recognition. For the first time in millennia, the voiceless have a voice... and in response, certain forces work harder to silence that voice and those people. And so, a group that's spent ages in seclusion has become activist instead. Their current affiliation with the other Disparates marks a cautious new step for a very old Craft.

Organization: Most Hippolytoi live together in conclaves that contain *only* women and children; Sisters who choose relationships with men must meet them outside the confines of the conclave. An elected council of seven Sisters known as the *epitropi* guides and governs each conclave. Within a group, this council forms the final authority about everything from that conclave's long-term direction to the role of its youngest member. Unlike most Awakened fellowships, the Hippolytoi don't discriminate between Awakened and unAwakened members. Everyone has a voice, and all voices are respected.

Initiation: Joining a society as secretive as the Sisters of Hippolyta is neither quick nor easy. A Sister might spend weeks or months getting to know a prospective initiate. Occasionally, a woman gets brought into a conclave for healing or sanctuary. If the prospect's personality and philosophy fit in with the Sisterhood, the epitropi might decide to offer her membership. If she accepts, she lives at the conclave for a month. During this time, the woman learns about the good and bad elements of life within the Craft (though none of their secrets), while the Sisters discern the probationary member's commitment and trustworthiness. If, by the end of this probation, all parties are satisfied, then the initiate begins her new life in a short ceremony in which she swears oaths to the Sisters of Hippolyta.

Affinity Spheres: Life or Mind.

Focus: Though all Sisters, Awakened or not, study the magickal Arts, they view magick as an intuitive connection rather than a metaphysical discipline. *Creation's Divine and Alive*, and although *Might is* (often) *Right*, *It's All Good* when you have courage, faith, and sisterhood.

Essentially a Pagan form of medicine-work with modern applications, the Hippolytan practices look like witchcraft, shamanism, High Ritual, craft work, and martial arts, although few Sisters would describe their Arts in those terms. Whenever possible, Hippolytoi prefer to do their willworking through group rituals. Typically, they enact these rites in their home language, although formal Sisters perform rituals in ancient Greek.

the taftani

Truth is my fire, art my joy, and courage my design.

Once upon a time, sultans flew on flying carpets. Viziers commanded and consulted djinni trapped in lamps or sparkling jewels. Wealthy merchants lived in wondrous castles that floated above the clouds. Once upon a time, the Taftâni – weavers of miracles, masters of Arts – created all these things, and more besides.

Independent and nomadic by nature, these early *ashavanti* ("followers of Truth") remained wary of European magi and their chained and confined magick. Where the Order of Reason saw horrifying forces that needed to be eradicated, and where the Council magi saw a solemn, exclusive Art, the Taftâni looked upon magick and saw a gift: a boundless expression of the beauty and power of *Asha* – Ultimate Truth – to be savored, relished, and enjoyed with as much vigor and enthusiasm as an excellent meal, a fine wine, or a sexual rendezvous.

Sadly, these wild mystics did not fare well as the world changed around them. To them, the modern sciences are manifestations of *druj* – "falsehood" – and the deluded souls who manifest it. When Weavers pitted their truths against those falsehoods, though, they all too often burned. And yet, despite impossible odds, the Taftâni survived... not many of them, to be sure, but enough to preserve their knowledge and their Arts. The sect's independent nature made its individuals hard to find and harder still to destroy. Most of the survivors took to the desert and joined Bedouin communities. Smaller enclaves took their cues from their Batini brethren and made themselves invisible, secretly passing on their Arts to worthy apprentices, observing the changing world and learning its workings and its ways.

Today's Taftâni remain flamboyant, defiant, and boisterous. They do, however, tend to have a better relationship with Paradox – a practical benefit gained through four centuries of trial and error. Although some still travel with the nomadic tribes of the Middle East, practicing the venerable Arts of spirits and command, most modern Weavers ensconce themselves in the glass palaces of oil-rich lands, channeling their arts through numbers, finance, and the wonders of technology – snatching the tools of Technocratic enemies right out from under them, like rugs yanked from beneath the feet of fools.

The city of Dubai arises from the desert as a base of operations for 21st-century Taftâni. What else can explain the fantastical buildings that defy the laws of physics – these impossible oases in the middle of the desert that entice people from all over the world to come and see, wonder and play? From the Burj-Al-Arab and the Dubai Tower to the underwater Hydropolis and the floating Rotating Skyscrapers, each new architectural achievement is invested with djinni or spirits... not as some Technocratic prison, but as embodiments of wondrous Art.

Stereotypes

The Traditions: There is no poetic vision in their works. They shape magick without joy or challenge, and thus do they fall far short of Truth.

The Technocracy: Our word for them – *dregvanti*, the followers of deception – reveals their true allegiance to the Devil-Kings. We will take their toys and burn away their shadows with our flames.

The Disparates: All too many of them lack art or courage; still, they stand against the Fallen Ones, and for that – for now – we stand together.

Organization: A fiercely independent lot, the Weavers do not congregate in houses, families, cabals, or the like. There *are* schools where newly Awakened *ashavanti* can learn the ways of old. In almost every case, however, Taftâni Masters train only one apprentice at a time, and rarely train more than three in a lifetime. Outside those apprenticeship bonds, the Weavers have – until recently – met only at *bagha* ("gardens") every six months. In recent years, however, such isolation has given way to pragmatic cooperation.

Only fools refuse to change in the face of extinction... and that face has come very close indeed. Confronted with the mad djinni of the Technocratic Order – and worse, with the poisonous corruption of that Order's Fallen masters – the Weavers have abandoned their old tradition of internal conflict. Although Taftâni society holds a *very* loose weave, it's far more stable... and more subtle... than it has ever been before. And in that quiet stability, it has prospered.

Initiation: Artistic vision, combined with practical aptitude and application, means more to the Taftâni than rigid ceremonies. A Weaver who cannot weave, one who cannot see the patterns before they shape themselves beneath his hands, is no true Weaver at all. A master, then, finds her apprentices wherever she finds them, trains them vigorously, tests them constantly, and places the utmost importance upon teaching them *well*.

Taking an apprentice is a sacred honor and responsibility to the ashavanti. Truth, after all, is easily dispelled by ignorance or corruption. That responsibility cuts both ways; a Weaver's apprentice endures a brutal workload of chores and services. By long tradition, a Taftâni master takes an apprentice somewhere between 11 and 16 years of age; teaches him the essential Arts until he dies, prospers, or beats his mentor in mystic combat; and then introduces him to the djinn and the many ways one might control such entities. If the pupil dies, then the master mourns... but not overmuch. If one presumes to weave divine fire, she knows, then that Weaver must have the strength of Will and Art to survive such majesty!

Affinity Spheres: Forces, Matter, Prime, or Spirit.

Focus: Asha's flame is limited only by a Weaver's Will and vision. Yet just as a fine carpet follows a wave, and a fire follows the currents of air and kindling, so too do the blessings of Asha follow the bright designs of intent and consciousness. The focus of a Taftâni mage involves shaping thoughts and materials toward a grand elaborate design – one that demonstrates the beauty of Truth and the artistry of the mage. *Might is Right* in a realm of *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, and so the *ashavanti* employ alchemy, craftwork, High Ritual Magick, crazy wisdom, the Art of Desire, a touch of hypertech, and dominion over men and spirits alike.

Templar Knights

The Returning Christ is no loving, humble carpenter. He will come this time with righteous wrath – and when He does, we'll stand beside Him.

The power and glory of God and His Church have blessed the world with love, forgiveness, (relative) peace, and civilized order for over two millennia. But in spite of the salvation that was purchased by Christ's holy blood, an ever-encroaching darkness requires constant vigilance and demands the attention of holy warriors who'll wage war against Satan's corruption and deceit. Those holy warriors were once great and many: the Swords of Grace, the Knights Hospitaller, the Order of the Hammer, the Falcons of Gabriel, and many more. Now, though, only the Knights Templar remain to carry Christ's standard and keep the vigil against a second Long Night.

Once, under the aegis of the Cabal of Pure Thought, the Knights Templar commanded respect throughout the Christian world, even among the other people of the Book whose understanding lacked the grace of Christ. Pledged to protect, secure, and someday restore the Holy Temple of Solomon – the physical and metaphysical seat of their power and a galvanizing symbol of God's reign on Earth – they held that duty sure. Despite their martial valor, however, the Knights were also renowned for their honor, kindness, and good works. In the name of their Lord, these Enlightened Knights educated the ignorant, clothed the naked, cured the sick, and fed the hungry. Theirs was a duty unto God.

Graced with Divine sight and Earthly wisdom, the Templars were the first to recognize the tendrils of darkness, sin, and pride within the Church, the ranks of the Gabrielites, and their fellow Conventions in the Order of Reason. They were among the first to speak out against such corruption, and they were also the first to fall victim to conspiracies within their Order. The notorious disgrace and slaughter of France's Templars, and the reputed blasphemies of which they were accused, remains a matter of record; far less famous is the history of the organization after their supposed fall. Despite conspiracies and legends, occult rumors and magely nonsense, the Templars keep their holy vigil. Their myths are many, but the truth is this: the Knights Templar still exist today – stronger in conviction and greater in numbers than anyone, Sleeper or Awakened, can conceive.

Then and now, the Templars serve as *Militia Christi*: soldiers of Christ, themselves anointed by His holy blood and their own. The sect's members refer to themselves as "loaves and fishes": the miracle waiting to happen, the small force that shall, by God's grace, become a powerful multitude. God will send the prayed-for Messiah, the Holy Warrior who will

Stereotypes

The Traditions: Those who work magick for personal glory rather than the glory of God are doomed to fail.

The Technocracy: Ravaged by the Fallen, governed by greed, treacherous to all mankind, the Technocratic Union is the face of the Beast on Earth. On the Day of Judgment, they have much to answer for... and I look forward to that meeting. *Eagerly.*

The Disparates: Clear of purpose if not pure of heart. They know our Hell-born enemies and fight bravely against them.

redeem the Earth. And when He arrives, as He soon will, He will find them ready and close at hand.

Despite their reputed merger with their old rivals in the Celestial Chorus, the Knights Templar retain an independent, if secretive, existence. And in a weird twist of fortune, they've forged a tentative alliance with sacred heretics, in hopes of redeeming those flawed souls (or at least using them as convenient shock troops) when the Messiah finally comes. Such mirror-games are nothing new to Christ's Militia; like any wise soldiers, they work with whatever circumstances give them. And so, out of necessity, they have changed; guns replace swords, laptops replace steeds, Kevlar replaces steel, and the old "men-only" rules have bowed to practicality. Women – though still discouraged in front-line combat – make up a growing number of support troops within the Knights. And in this age, even these Dove Knights are warriors of a sort. Satan's front lines are everywhere these days, after all, and an attack could come as easily from a computer virus or an IED as from a battlefield blade.

Organization: Today's Templars exist as a network of small lodges, each presided over by an Honored Master who's elected by the initiated members of the lodge. These Honored Masters report directly to a smaller body of regional Resplendent Masters, also elected from amongst their ranks. The Resplendent Masters receive directives from a small council of Generals who guide the larger, global work of these hidden Knights. The network operates largely through Internet connections, their communications coded in secret scriptures and references only the Knights Templar understand.

Each lodge contains Brothers and Sisters, Aspirants, and Knights of various degrees and ranks. Brothers and Sisters have demonstrated faith and courage but have not yet received the Holy Fire of Awakening. Aspirants have been blessed with Holy Vision, but they must still receive training and trial before initiation. Many lodges have been dedicated either to Peace (healing, charity, and education) or War (armed conflict); the former are all-female, and the latter are all-male.

Other lodges welcome both genders and Knights of either path; these rare lodges focus on training, recruitment, and preparation for the final war.

Initiation: Like military recruiters, the Templar Knights are always looking for a few good men. A prospective candidate might be invited to participate in a lodge's projects and initiatives. Compatible candidates could be asked to join the lodge as Brothers or Sisters; those who display the Holy Fire soon find themselves assigned to a Knight who guides the potential initiate in the rituals of prayer, purification, and dedication necessary to become an Aspirant.

Affinity Spheres: Forces, Life, Mind, or Prime.

Focus: A Templar Knight is just a vessel for God's Will, not his own. Despite *A World of Gods and Monsters*, there is *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, so *Might is Right* when God guides your soul. Faith and martial arts provide the core of every Templar's training, and though dominion, craftwork, and hypertech appear in the group's modern practices, every instrument is an extension of God's hand.

Wu Lung

Even in stillness, the earth shakes.

Like the mighty Yangtze river, magick flows through the Middle Kingdom, twisting and diverting from its source to spread across the land and feed the mountains, valleys, plains, deserts, forests, and people. Ancient myths proclaim that the Han people came into being through the grace of the ancient gods, who descended from the heavens in the bellies of dragons to bring order to the chaotic world. The august persons of this age included the Yellow Emperor, Huang Di, and his mystical advisors, all capable of performing feats of incredible magick and supernatural power. Now their descendants – the Wu Lung, roughly translated as "dragon wizards" – maintain that sacred duty under Heaven.

The Wu Lung trace their origins to this early group of divine beings; indeed, during China's long Imperial history, these mages (all male, of course) used this dragon lineage to steer the empire to greater heights, achieving great wealth and status. In many respects, the Wu Lung *were* China, which is why they ignored the invitations and warnings of those barbaric Traditions. By the time British colonialists – funded and armed by the Technocratic Union – arrived in Asia, the Wu Lung inner council members had been so thoroughly blinded and corrupted by absolute power that they failed to see the danger. Between Japanese, European, and American intruders, followed by the Communist Cultural Revolution, the 20th century witnessed the near-obliteration of these ancient masters.

Capping off that century by allying with their ancient Akashic enemies, the Wu Lung appear to have humbled themselves. This impression is quite deceptive. In fact, the Dragons have been busy... most notably in the pursuit of old gold and new initiates. Gold, the incorruptible metal, has been a primary focus for centuries, less for its monetary worth than for its mystic essence. As Wu Lung discovered long ago, pure gold works against sinister forces, driving corruption from its presence. Seals of gold, for example, can bind evil men and lessen their influence upon Enlightened folk. And so, under cover of alliances and illusionary feebleness, the Wu Lung strive to recover the lost gold of Imperial China, returning it home for a grand ritual of incredible power.

When they were forced out of power, the Wu Lung had to take a long and critical look at their traditions. It was stagnation, after all, that caused Imperial China's weakness and collapse. Today's Wu Lung still believe that they're the rightful descendants of Huang Di and the old gods; they still practice the intricate rituals and ceremonies of their ancestors. However, they also realize that their sacred traditions have become the ligatures around their own throats. In order to prosper once again, they must be as clever and flexible as a dragon... or as bright and harmonious as gold.

Stereotypes

The Traditions: They ignored the natural order of things and are now reduced to a squabbling collection of untrained babes presiding over a pit of chaos. Our alliance with them is bound to be short and fruitful... at least, for us.

The Technocracy: Beneath the talons and teeth of the Dragons, they will pay their souls to the hells of the Yama Kings.

The Disparate Alliance: Our past has taught us that isolation is a weakness... and that even unwashed mongrels may support the will of Heaven.

Whereas the Dragons once maintained an almost exclusively male (and exclusively Chinese) membership, tradition must bow to circumstance. Today's Wu Lung might be a man or woman of Chinese heritage; the so-called mongrel taint of non-Chinese blood is a regrettable necessity in such confused times, but no non-Chinese people are ever considered. Dedicated to Heaven's Celestial Order, the modern Dragon considers herself an elite heir to glorious succession. Though she cultivates grace, there's an arrogance about her. She is, after all, an ancestral ruler of the greatest culture on Earth. Those who doubt China's magnificence will perish in China's rebirth.

Organization: Although the Wu Lung no longer maintain the dizzying social structure they once commanded, some vestiges of that ancient structure remain. All Wu Lung still recognize the *T'ien Kung te Huang Ti Wu Lung* (Heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizards) as their supreme leader and his counterpart, the *Feng Huan Hou Wu* (Phoenix Empress Wizard) as his near-equal. Though most modern Dragon Wizards have never even seen these two personages, they still recognize that the red thread of heritage and tradition is preserved and maintained through those august elders.

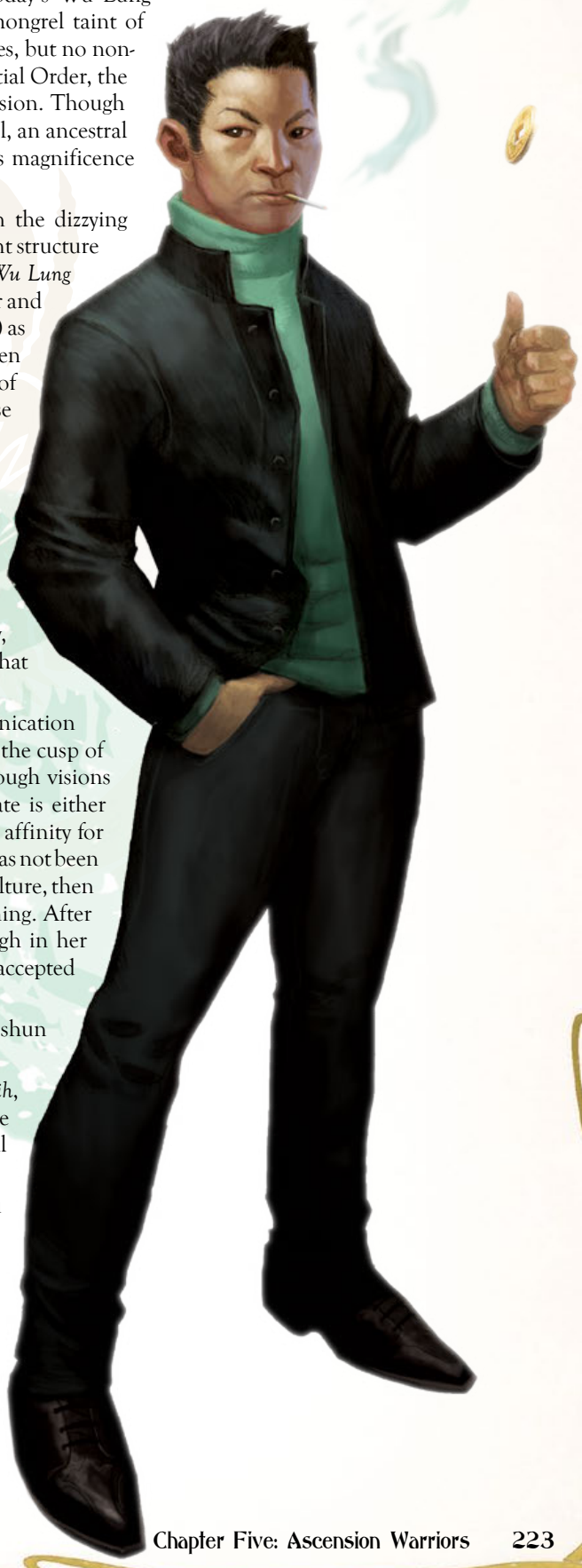
The supreme leaders appoint regional ministers to oversee the selection of *Sifu*, or teachers, under the authority of the Dragon School (rulership), the Phoenix School (healing and mercy), and the Tiger School (fighting and strategy). The Sifu, in turn, educate their adepts and senior students and select prospective candidates for initiation. At all levels, a Dragon Wizard remains acutely aware of where she exists upon the ladder of Wu Lung society, who she owes obeisance to, and what her responsibilities within that hierarchy must be.

Initiation: Wu Lung Sifu utilize divination and communication with ancestors and spirit guides to find potential new recruits on the cusp of Awakening. Those Sifu then contact the prospective initiate through visions and dreams, hoping to trigger an Awakening. An ideal candidate is either fully Chinese or of close Chinese heritage. Young people with an affinity for international business and finance are particularly valuable. If she has not been raised with the traditions and values of pre-Communist Chinese culture, then the candidate undergoes a period of education, testing, and training. After the Sifu is satisfied that the candidate has progressed well enough in her training and performed well enough on her tests, she's formally accepted as a *Ch'uang Shih*, or senior student of the Wu Lung.

Affinity Spheres: Spirit, Forces, Matter, or Life... though they shun such degraded terminology!

Focus: An Awakened soul is a spiritual inheritance – the *Shih*, or divine ancestor. Magick is a duty to tradition, an honor of the ancestors, and the key to the past and future majesty of China. Ritual is essential, and sloppy improvisation is to be avoided at all costs.

Chinese alchemy and High Ritual Magick form the core of Wu Lung practices, reinforced with social dominion and the martial art of *Kuei Lung Chuan* – a.k.a. Dragon Spirit Kung Fu. **(See Chapter Nine, p. 427.)** Such power comes through *Li* – the righteousness of Heaven and an adherence to its perfections. Exquisite ceremony mirrors heavenly perfection. *Divine Order* will allow the Wu Lung to *Bring Back the Golden Age* and banish chaos forever.



Part V: The Fallen

"Send in the Hammer and clean it up."

"Sir," says the aide, "if I may...?"

"You may not."

The aide drops his pretense of servility. "But, sir, we're talking about American citizens here."

"No we're not," says the man behind the desk. "We are addressing looters, thugs, and criminals, and we will treat them as such."

"But they're people..." the aide's voice slides toward an irritating whine "...and they're desperate. They're just taking what they need to–"

"Laws are laws." The man turns back to his papers. "Handle it."

And so they did.

The Hammer went in. The situation was dealt with.

Swamps and floodlands provide excellent storage for unwanted remains. Especially after hurricanes and other such disasters, certain people simply disappear...

Overtures of Plague

Man is a virus pretending it's a saint. Our dreams are jokes the universe laughs about in its sleep. Beneath every good man or woman's façade is an ape with a scorpion's tail. We are, in short, a mistake. And the Fallen are glad to tell us so.

They probably won't tell you to your face. As a rule, they're more subtle than that. Instead, a Nephandus wins your trust, gives you gifts, provides every overture of friendship. He won't come screaming out of the darkness with veins in his teeth, although he'll be glad to point you at someone who will. No, the true Fallen mage is like Lassie with Joker venom – a loyal companion until the moment his poison kicks in and you both laugh yourselves to death.

He doesn't expect to get out of this alive. When Creation burns, he'll burn too. But see, that's his choice – he *knows* the fire's coming, and he would rather be a flamethrower than kindling. The Nephandic Path is not a state of Ascension but of Descent: a willing embrace of the Void, which the Fallen sometimes call *the Absolute*. A Nephandus, then, has shared communion with that Absolute and has become the heat-death of the universe in human form. It doesn't matter what you do, he believes. You were worm-meat and ashes before you were born. The gods are insane and justice is a lie, and the evidence supports his point of view. He is, then, perhaps the most dangerous creature in the World of Darkness: a mage with dark truths on his side.

Those who've heard of the Nephandi imagine them as mad-eyed, screeching weirdos babbling about Outer Gods as they slash up some poor virgin's rack. It's true that some Nephandi fit that description, but those folks are primarily distractions. A typical Nephandus is the enemy you won't see coming... or, if you *do*, you'll want to trust him. He's probably attractive, usually well-off, and possessed of charismatic confidence. He *knows* he's right with the surety of a sociopathic fundamentalist, and he doesn't give a fuck about rules or consequences. As a result, he's incredibly appealing. People will give literally all they can to be with him... or to *be* him... and that's where his power lies. Sure, he's got magick if he needs it, but that appeal is his greatest weapon.

Predatory Shadows

There've always been people who found allies among predatory gods. Just as certain people reached toward the sun, others ran off into the darkness. There, they learned terrible things. On the rare occasions when such people would return to their old tribes, their awful transformations and atrocious deeds branded them anathema. Forsaking, and forsaken by, the people they had loved, these seekers nurtured bloody grudges that often led to bloody deeds. A few were born to that Path, but most stepped out on it willingly. Even before there were words to describe them, such people understood the cosmic joke and wanted to be in on it.

The term *Nephandi* has many potential origins. It might come from *Nif' ur 'en Daah*, the "Eaters of the Weak" in ancient Sumeria; it could come from the Arabic *Naffas Iblis* ("Breath of the Adversary"), the Greek *nephlos* ("cloud"), Germanic *nibla/*

Fallen as Player Characters?

Can you play a Nephandus? That's a Storyteller call. We, however, advise *no*. First off, Nephandi are sick, twisted, manipulative fucks who make everyone else their bitch. That might sound fun in theory, but in practice it would probably destroy your group. Secondly, they do things that are, shall we say, *unpleasant*; unless you want to play Gross-Out Bingo, that sort of thing's best left to Storyteller characters and the mighty **Blackout**. **(See Chapter Seven, p.345.)**

The real reason to avoid Nephandic player-characters, though, is this: **Mage** is an interactive game in which the players are encouraged to act out aspects of themselves. Those aspects have *power*, and the things we express through them can influence our daily lives. If you really *want* Nephandic deeds to influence your daily life, that's your call, but we don't recommend it. There's something to be said for this level of shadow-play, but it's not a casual choice. If and when someone decides to go down that path, it should be handled with care and an eye toward the potential consequences.

In short, it's your group's decision... but not really a wise idea until and unless you're prepared to go a lot deeper than you might expect.

nifl ("mist/ dark"), or the Latin *nefarious* ("to negate rightness"). The modern form blends Greek, Latin, and Arabic grammars in the sort of subversive chaos that the Fallen appreciate. By any name, these mages choose to become hungry shadows, following a Path of Screams all the way to oblivion.

Why? They've got plenty of reasons. Occasionally, it's anger at the hypocrisy of goodness or lust for things we're not supposed to enjoy. It's disgust with a corrupt status quo or revenge for real or imaginary wrongs. A Nephandus can choose curiosity about verboten topics, indulgence of appalling passions, or simple perversity in an apparently meaningless cosmos. For whatever reasons he or she might give, the end is the same. The Fallen One perceives a darkly existential view: the universe is meaningless, virtue is delusion, and the only thing that matters is an enjoyable ride to annihilation.

There's still some Miltonian "reign in hell" mentality in the modern Nephandic ranks – a gleeful embrace of glorious demonism. Those Fallen, though, provide the shock troops for their more Enlightened peers. Sure, there's a bit of old-school devil worship going on. It's in the group's best interests, after all, to have visible targets running around to provide scapegoats and targets for other sects. The serious Nephandi, though, have graduated from Satanic Kindergarten. Yes, there *are* demonic entities out there. Yes, the Deep Umbra *is* crawling with horrors. Of *course* you can make pacts with dark masters who provide scary powers for a price. The true Nephandic Masters, though, understand that the root of all evils can be found in the human heart.

That's the punch line of the Fallen joke: a creature so insignificant in the grand scheme of things perceives himself as the center of the universe... and in his corner of the universe, he's right. He believes that gods weigh his every move and choice with the scales of all eternity, and he feels that his value in their eyes entitles him to commit atrocities in their name. He'll poison babies and declare his righteousness. He'll steal and kill and claim God loves him best. His dreams conjure heavens and hells and science and magic and art and waste and television and every other thing he can envision. But in the cosmic eye, he's less than dust. When the lights go out forever, he'll see the true face of Eternity. And in that endless midnight orgasm, Eternity will extinguish him.

To the Nephandi, that day can't come soon enough.

Slaves of the Star-Squid?

Persistent rumors link the Fallen to alien masters on the far side of eternity. Supposedly, the Nephandi serve these malignant gods, paving the way for an eventual conquest of Earth. In the late 1990s, these pawns of the Outer Darkness and the demons that live there were supposedly hunted, killed, cut off from their tentacled overlords, and either driven out beyond the Horizon, or else whittled down to insignificance.

Nonsense.

Oh, sure – there *are* Nephandi who booga-dee-boo their way through appeals to obscene star-squids, cast lots for evil gods, and dream of things best left nameless, waiting in the Outer Dark. But the outsiders who see these Fallen souls caper in the light of some unholy majesty are missing the point entirely.

Nephandi Ranks

Among the Fallen, rank isn't so much a progression of titles so much as it's a reflection of power. Although the Nephandi use a few honorifics to define themselves, those titles might be more sarcastic than sincere. Most of them wind up being used more by outsiders to define what they *think* they see among the Fallen. Even so, status *is* a reflection of power, and one-upmanship has a time-honored place among the Fallen and their various pawns. Whatever the origins and intentions behind these titles might be, they mark hierarchies within the Fallen ranks:

- **pawns (unAwakened):** Willing or witting mortals who spread Fallen influence; pursue Fallen agendas; or work as muscle, playmates, and targets for the group's enemies. Obviously, these folks don't think of themselves as pawns, and may give themselves all kinds of ridiculous titles like "archfiend," "high priest," and "senator."
- **pawns (Awakened):** Deluded or seduced mages who further the Nephandic agenda, often without realizing they're doing it.
- **pawns (Night-Folk):** Vampires, werewolves, hunters, and so on who either collaborate intentionally with Fallen mages or else serve as smokescreens and cannon-fodder with a nasty bite. Like other pawns, they're almost inevitably convinced that they're in charge of the arrangement... and they're almost inevitably wrong.

All types of pawns are sometimes referred to as ***dregvati***, "followers of the lie"... or simply as "the dregs."

- **Shaytans:** Living weapons of the damned with heavy-duty powers and a gleeful urge to destroy. These folks know *exactly* what they are, and they truly enjoy their job.
- **adsinistrati:** Skillful tempters and salesmen of the Abyss. Though they'll almost never answer to this name, they're among the most effective – and dangerous – Nephandi alive. That said, they won't fight unless their backs are to the wall. Their goal is *corruption*, not carnage.
- **prelati:** Strategists of the infernal cause, these Nephandic Masters use pawns and allies rather than direct force. When they have to be, however, they're remarkably powerful. Prelati are the 3:00 am phone calls to which vampire princes and mortal leaders respond with immediate obedience... or else. Female prelati are sometimes called ***Lili***, in honor of Lilith and her devotees.
- **Gilledians:** Fallen Archmages, too corrupted and Paradox-ridden to set foot in the mortal world. These demonic entities seem to be trapped in Otherworldly Realms; other mages, Nephandic and otherwise, are brought to *them*, not the other way around. And in those Realms, they're insanely powerful.
- **aswadim:** Bodhisattvas of the Void; infernal saints. Unlike Gilledians, these entities don't seem monstrous. Instead, they manifest as soft-spoken helpers and willing teachers. Nephandus? What's a Nephandus? An aswad rarely tips her hand to show what she truly is. She simply leads a pawn toward temptation and lets human nature take its course...
- **The Dark Masters:** What *are* these entities? Dreaming ghosts? Demonic hosts? Elder things? Giant evil gods? Ultimately, they're enigmas – masks for the Absolute. Conventional wisdom says that the Nephandi serve their Dark Masters, but the truth is a hall of shadowy broken mirrors that all appear to reflect deceptions. It could be that the whole Dark Masters thing is one more sick joke in the Nephandic arsenal. Perhaps the most perceptive Nephandi worship their own sinister reflections... or maybe they understand that there's nothing there worth worshipping at all.

The Nephandi aren't pawns for hive-dwelling demonoids or voracious elder gods. They see the truth behind the face of cosmic obscenity, and they realize that it looks like us.

The entities called *Those Beyond* are not the chess masters of abject servants. They're embodiments of the Absolute – horrific masks grafted by human imagination onto something too vast to contemplate without madness. Although it's comforting to view the Fallen as deluded playthings of alien pretenders, the fact (as much as facts can be discerned in such cosmic business, anyway) is this: the Nephandi have looked behind the mask of eternity, and its wisdom has driven them sane.

So if and when they dress themselves in predictable costumes of Satan-kissing freaks, it's a masquerade the Fallen understand... and few other mages do. They don't serve Outer Gods, in truth. Nephandi simply recognize such beings as reflections of their own Enlightenment... a savage wisdom that sees the Absolute in every living thing and knows what's waiting at the end of All.

In short, they understand the mortal comedy. That's what makes them so *very* good at what they do.

The Winners, Spoiled

The Nephandi are playing a long, deep game, tossing out pawns to distract their opponents. These pawns, though dangerous, are not the true threat. The Traditions and Technocracy believe they've exiled the Fallen to someplace beyond the Horizon... and they're wrong. In reality, the Nephandi have been infiltrating the Council, the Inner Circle, the Disparates, and... most of all... the mortal world. Only the Marauders remain uncorrupted, and that's mostly because the Mad are too far gone to corrupt.

That's the awful truth of the Ascension War: while the Traditions and Technocracy battle one another, the Fallen

occupy the field, buy the horses, and sell artillery to all sides. In short, *they're winning*. And the longer the other factions fight, the darker their World of Darkness grows.

Now, the Fallen have plenty of pawns to waste: the angry teens with guns and bombs; the media pundits who tear societies apart for profit; the tycoons to whom no one else matters unless that other party provides them a bit more wealth; the racists, sexists, homophobes, and fundies whose fears inspire virtual and often physical violence; the religious zealots who plant bombs in playgrounds, fly planes into skyscrapers, or recite ancient scriptures while they bathe their hands in blood. The drug gangs and the slavers, holy warlords with child armies. From the wetbrain puking in the gutter to the billionaire slashing jobs while using prison labor and foreign slaves to increase the bottom line, these people advance the Fallen agenda. Very few of them consider themselves Satanists, and most think they're right with God. And every one of them – with their selfishness – strangles hope and shapes reality.

The Sleepers are feeding on hate and puking up lies.

This is the Consensus. *This* is the World of Darkness.

And *that's* what's killing magick in the world. Not science. Not technology. Not even apathy. Just mindless indulgence and tribal hate.

The Nephandic gospel moves the world.

Roads to Hell

The Fallen and their pawns are everywhere. Few of them, though, are obvious as what they are. While Technocrats chase infernal cultists, the worst offenders call their shots. The Traditions have fewer Nephandi in their ranks, but they have more pawns and dupes than anyone expects. As for the Disparates, it's an open question. Although the Templars, in particular, have dedicated themselves to rooting out such corruption, their fanaticism breeds the fury and despair that make the Fallen so powerful in this world.

How did they *get* so powerful? By taking advantage of human weaknesses. The Fallen don't need to haul folks off to attend Black Mass; instead, they encourage apathy, despair, greed, and selfishness. They build people up and tear people down and use pride and fear as tools to do so. A politician doesn't have to sell her soul to a slavering eldritch thing in order to spread Nephandic influence. She just has to gut social budgets, pocket a few bribes, give free rein to polluting industries, and purge citizen rights while putting people on the streets. She probably won't realize what she's doing, and she might even have spiritual advisors to tell her she's doing God's work on Earth. The advisors themselves might not be Nephandi... but quite a few of them *are*, and the rest take their cues from those. Corporations, churches, governments, armies... the Fallen influence them all; not with force, in most cases, but typically by telling people what they want to hear.

That's how the Nephandi overwhelmed the Technocratic safeguards and wormed their way into the halls of Doissetep and Horizon: they nurtured the hubris inside every mage until many of the most powerful willworkers alive believed in their own divine rights. The Fallen pointed their pawns at one another, singled out the biggest threats, and staged an infernal pantomime to direct attention away from what they've actually been doing. While the Union and the Council teamed up to shut down death camps, the Nephandi sent their most influential pawns off to deep-cover scientific posts. Brave mages destroyed the Thule Gesellschaft, but hubris destroyed Hiroshima. "*The ends justify the means*," "*It's a dog-eat-dog world*," "*Survival of the fittest*"... even if the Fallen didn't coin these phrases (though perhaps, some *might* have done so), those ideas advance the Nephandic cause. Humanity has many roads to hell, and those roads are always open for business.

A Diabolic Trinity

Essentially, there are three kinds of Nephandi:

- ***Dregvati*:** These dupes, allies, toys, tools, playmates, fall-guys, and other assorted idiots don't really understand the full scope of what they're doing... if they know what they're doing at all. The dregs haven't Fallen in the true sense of making a decision to join the Nephandi – they're just useful pawns for influence, distraction, and fun, and they may even believe they're good guys despite the awful things they do.

- ***Barabbi*:** Supposedly named for Barabbas, the murderer set free in place of Christ, the *barabbi* began along a different Path but then converted to the Nephandic cause. Traitors to their original sects, these people have had their souls literally turned inside out in the *Cauls*: metaphysical inversion chambers in which an Awakened Avatar chooses to damn itself and be born again through the Gate of Dark Rebirth. Now, they embody the worst qualities of their former sects... and probably still belong to those groups, tempting their colleagues toward atrocious deeds and taking their philosophies to the sickest possible extremes.

- ***Widderslainte*:** Essentially born damned, the *widderslainte* bear the reincarnated Avatars of dead Nephandi. Mockeries of the Euthanatoic ideal of reincarnation as a cosmic reset, these mages sometimes struggle with their destinies before giving in. In more ways than one, such people are Original Sin on two legs. Can they find redemption? Perhaps... but most don't even care to find out.

Among these three types, the *barabbi* seem most dangerous to other mages, with the *widderslainte* providing tragic counterpoints, occasional pathos, and existential horror. It's the pawns, though, that command the board, if not the strategies, in the Nephandic deep game. If belief shapes reality, and the majority of people accept perversity, hate, and selfishness as the natural order of things, then reality itself becomes perverse, hateful, and selfish.

Perhaps the weird manifestations of Paradox – so often blamed on the Technocratic paradigm – are actually reflections of twisted human belief. That would explain entities like Old Man Wrinkle and the essence of Paradox Realms. What better manifestation, after all, could there be for a selfish world than to take its most brilliant souls and lock them up – out of sight,

out of mind – in a metaphysical reality jail? The Nephandi, then, might even be shaping the Paradox Effect, turning reality itself into a weapon without casting a single spell.

That's the essence of Nephandic strategy: get your enemies shooting at shadows... or at one another... while winning them over to your point of view, all the while seeming like their best friend in the world.

Fallen Sects

Nephandic influence reaches from Wall Street to heavy-metal vomit parties. In few of those places, though, is it obvious. Again, the most prominent sects provide moving targets and shock-troop overkill when the Fallen need it. The ones *without* oogie-boogie masks exert Nephandic influence across the mortal world.

Some of the groups most likely to enter a **Mage** chronicle include...

The K'llasshaa

Servitors of obscene overlords, the K'llasshaa sect has been around in one form or another since the Predatory Age. Associated in ancient works with the subhuman *K'wahhll*, whose degraded practices can still be found in secret corners of the wilderness, K'llasshaa Nephandi embrace the Hungry Void in all its sublime terror. To them, light and life are atrocities committed against eternity; in return, they commit atrocities against anything and everything they can find. For them, depravity is reverence and blasphemy is a holy act.

Sometimes obvious, often devious, this sect mixes dementia with patience. Its maddest members commit the most unspeakable sorts of crimes, and the saner ones wind them up and set them loose. This sect – and its many cults, like the *Wailing Darkness*, *Flaming Brand Church*, and *Circle of the Broken Star* – appeals to disaffected intellectuals, mentally deficient rage-heads, inbred recluses, and folks who are, to be blunt, batshit insane. Rituals and initiations are as gorily perverse as the cult leaders can make them, and the survivors become human horrorshows with weird (though often unAwakened) powers and insatiable perversities.

Malfeans

Some folks believe that a titanic spirit-Wyrm is gnawing at the universe. In the World of Darkness, the werewolves accept this as a literal truth. Certain mages serve this Wyrm as well, and though they might view it as some symbolic abstraction of fundamental chaos, they're still – as the Garou put it – "of the Wyrm."

These Malfeans run with the *Black Spiral Dancer* werewolf tribe, work for *Pentex* (the Wyrm's pet megacorp), or serve one or more of the *Maeljin Incarna* – godlike avatars of spiritual malaise. Uncanny even to most Nephandi, they often display grotesque deformities and powers: poison pustules, bestial fangs, toxic vomit, and, of course, tentacles, among other things. The ones without such mutations have warped souls so corrosive that all but the most corrupted Fallen find them repellent. Their decay feels almost elemental, drawn from living fusions of spirit, flesh, and rot. (See the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** series for details.)

Infernal Cults

When that kid with the Necrophagia t-shirt cuts up Fido in the name of Satan, he's not a Nephandus but could be a pawn for one. Such infernal cults are not a sect so much as they're an approach to damnation in which the cultists devote themselves to demonic powers. Expecting a ringside seat at the rise of Satan or his ilk, these folks belong to groups like the *New Rite Church*, the *Dai Han Loc*, and the *Hidden Trinity of the Black Watch*. And just because they tend to be pathetic doesn't mean they can't be dangerous!

Composed mostly of Sleepers with a few Nephandic puppet masters, infernal cults infiltrate society on several fronts. The blatant ones channel teenage rage through violent music scenes, rowdy frats, decadent packs of wealthy assholes, and, paradoxically, religious groups who think God's will involves blowing people up. A handful of true Infernalist mages, meanwhile, maintain the Black Arts of medieval legend, devoting themselves to Lucifer or Baphomet in an effort to gain a favored place in Hell. These Nephandi make dangerous enemies, blending religious dedication with demonic pacts and the power that comes with both.

The Gatekeepers

The Absolute waits beyond the sky. The Gatekeepers seek the keys to that barrier. Striving to unlock the Horizon and let the Darkness in, they've been scanning the stars for over 4000 years, awaiting the return of Those Who Walked Above Us in the ancient days.

Legends speak of demon cities filled with black temples decorated with human skins. Struck down by angry gods and their followers, those cities passed into memory. Sodom, Enoch, Quin'che-La, Bhat, Iyrnntorr... their names still echo in the throats of Gatekeepers everywhere. In each sacred place, the Devil-Kings celebrated the oldest gods of all... and ever since the fall of the last stronghold of the Devil-King Age, they've been plotting to open the heavens and let eternal hell rain through.

Though they originated in Mesopotamia, the Gatekeepers are everywhere. Their scriptures, once rare, can be found in new translations on bookstore shelves and Internet sites. On the surface, these devotees seem calm, smart, and oh-so-civilized. Many of them are quite literate and can quote Sumerian prophecies and string-theory treatises at length... and tie them together as well. You'd never know upon meeting these people that they skin stray cats for writing paper or keep vans filled with torture equipment for equally stray children they find when no one else is looking. It's not at all obvious that these people have been part of the Void Engineer Convention since its origins in the Renaissance. The Gatekeepers have had millennia to master subtlety. Unless you know what you're looking for, they're essentially... and sometimes *literally*... invisible.

Technephandi

No one actually *calls* them "technephandi," of course, but the Fallen members of the Technocracy (plus a few *barabbi* Adepts, Etherites, and other technomancers) use Awakened hypertech for appalling ends. Imagine the corrupted cyborg, demonic hacker, or demented space marine. Consider a mad

scientist whose lab sits ankle-deep in blood while mutilated subjects scream their lives out in barbed wire cages. Envision the Syndicate boss who knows damn well that his latest round of layoffs will result in suicides, abused kids, and rising crime rates... and so he lays folks off just to make that happen. These are the soulless Technocrats everyone talks about, and their hold on the Inner Circle is just one of their many crimes...

The Decadenti

How does she stay so thin? How did he get so pumped? Why do so many people worship the stars and celebutantes of modern media culture? That's a trade secret you might hear about but not believe. There really *is* a cult of celebrity, and it's older than you might think...

The *decadenti* date back to late medieval Europe, when the confluxof trade and aristocracy bred a class of people rich enough to indulge themselves and callous enough to take whatever they wanted. As their bastardized French/ Italian name suggests, this Nephandic branch flourished in Renaissance-era France and Italy, spawning cults like the *Laughing Rose*, the *Siren Circle*, and the *Jade Cross of St. Lucifer* (who inspired the band called St. Lucifer as well). These groups, and others from that era, still survive today. Their members enjoy access to unearthly pleasures and success.

In a world where few people believe in stupid things like souls, the bargains struck by would-be *decadenti* seem like harmless games. They're *not*, of course, and by the time a new member realizes what she's playing with, it's too late to leave the cult. Oh, sure, they might hunt you down, torture you for fun, and then leave your body in a compromising position so that the press and Internet can have field days with your corpse. It's far more fun, however, to wreck you while you're still alive – to sic the sect's flacks and paparazzi on you and then turn your fame into one big scandal. Remember a certain King of Pop, or the trailer-trash teen queen who crashed and burned in the public eye? That's how the *decadenti* deal with folks who want to duck out on the Fame Monsters. Meanwhile, the petty Arts and demonic gifts enjoyed by famous *decadenti* push Sleepers toward impossible ideals... and thus, toward despair when they cannot meet those goals. A particular *decadenti* sect, the *New Youth Foundation*, takes advantage of such despair by specializing in plastic surgery and other cosmetic and anti-aging treatments. (It's *amazing* how much money people will pay to be tortured and mutilated in the name of beauty!) The *decadenti*, of course, are always looking for new playmates – and in an age when everyone wants to be a star, they're never lacking for fresh meat.

Los Sangrientos

The bloody gods of Mesoamerica were never truly stilled by Catholicism. As such groups tend to do, they often went literally underground, into cave-based secret societies that honeycomb both the natural and the social landscape. Throughout the hacienda age, these groups sold their secrets to masters and slaves alike. Blood, after all, is blood, and the old gods remained thirsty.

To Los Sangrientos (in the female form, *Las Sangrientas*; sometimes collectively known as the *Morongos*), the Spanish conquest brought new refinements for ancient sacrifice. The *Inquisitores*, after all, had many techniques of inflicting pain to call upon. By the time Mexico won its independence (with help from Los Sangrientos and their nightmarish devotions), the Bloody Ones had established solid foundations throughout Central and South America and the Southwest U.S. territories. Since then, they've kept feeding *Los Carnivoros* – a fusion of Catholic saints and devils with Aztec, Incan, and Mayan godheads – the proverbial blood and souls... plus *pain*. Lots and lots of pain...

The original devotees were not Nephandi in the truest sense, but the sect has been adopted over time. Morongos call the Cauls *las Flores del Renacimiento*, or "the Flowers of Rebirth," and they treasure the agonies of inversion in *las Flores'* embrace. With the modern era, they've adopted modern weapons, power tools, and media into their holy sacraments, often filming their ceremonies and selling them as snuff films and true-death documentaries. In the new millennium, Sangrientos post these videos on YouTube with death-metal soundtracks and warnings that attract attention from bored and curious web surfers; as a result, they've gained a presence in the Digital Web as well... one that's growing like a tumor in that virtual world.

Back in Meatspace, Los Sangrientos manage both drug cartels and government agencies, pitting them against one another in orgies of sacrifice. The horrific tortures and massacres associated with those wars are often (though not always...) celebrations of *Los Carnivoros*. Traditionally associated with Latino culture, they've spread to other ethnicities as well. Is it coincidence, after all, that a prominent gang brotherhood calls itself "the Bloods...?" Perhaps it is... or maybe not.

Hammer Security Response (a.k.a. God's Hammer)

"*God told me to kill you*" is one of the oldest excuses a mass-murderer uses. God's Hammer proudly furnishes that excuse. Ostensibly a maximum security force, HSR is an Apocalyptic Christian mercenary firm that employs over 20,000 men and women, nearly all of them combat veterans from various wars. Are they all Nephandi? Of course not. In fact, they believe just the opposite; to them, the Second Coming is in progress and they'll provide backup for Jesus Christ's return. Why Almighty God would *need* backup is anyone's guess, but that's their line and they swallow it whole.

Despite their avowed Christianity, the true masters of the Hammer are essentially Antichrists. Belief, though, promotes powerful illusions, especially when it's backed up with money, guns, and the ability to use both whenever you want. Founded in the late 1980s by Col. Erik Rose Hammer (a Nephandus who Fell during the Vietnam War), God's Hammer gets deployed to trouble spots all over the world... especially places where Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and other infidels get restless.

Hammer provides a special thorn in the sides of Templar Knights, who all too often find themselves fighting alongside so-called fellow Christians, who actually serve the enemy. Some folks speculate that Hammer Security began among the Templars; Col. Rose is reputed to have been a Templar himself,

and he might still call upon his old comrades for backup. As far as the Templar leadership's concerned, Hammer operatives are among the worst of the worst in Satan's army. The fact that God's Hammer employs the Knights' own devotion against them has surely got to hurt...

Although very few Hammer operatives have paranormal talents, they've got the best firepower money can buy, plus enough political clout and religious zeal to commit mass murder and get away with it. In third-world countries and urban disaster zones, the Hammer *dregvati* execute Nephandic plans while supposedly doing the Lord's work. And so, for many mages and their allies, the Hammer is the last thing they feel.

The Pipers

Slavery did not end in the 1800s. True, it's no longer legal in most parts of the world, but like most forbidden pleasures, it simply went underground. The Pipers are not the only slave network in the world, but they are perhaps the most organized. Rooted in *Hilf Al'Aj* – "the Ivory Pact" forged between European and African merchants at the core of the Triangle Trade – the modern Pipers manage an international pipeline of human misery and unfettered profit.

In the old days, slavery involved rounding up victims or enemies, hauling them off to a staging ground, transporting them to market, and then buying and selling that human cargo. Back then, the process took months or even years; today, it can take less than 48 hours, and the cargo often comes to the buyer. Refugees, illegal immigrants, people seeking new starts, even children sold off by desperate or uncaring parents – they all follow the Pipers to the gates of someone else's hell. For the price of a promise, certain people will hand themselves over to guides, employers, talent agents, and gentlemen of means. And with modern transportation making the whole deal quick and easy, new merchandise can board a plane in Vilyuysk and wind up in Abü Zaby, Tokyo, or Los Angeles within a day or two. Smart Pipers can even get the cargo to pay for the ride, perhaps picking up a finder's fee on the other end of that transaction.

As with many other Nephandic sects, most Pipers are *dregvati*, not full-fledged Fallen mages. They're just in it for the money and for the sense of power the business gives them over other human beings. Even so, the most formidable Pipers are either Awakened slavers or invested cultists with demonic patrons and abilities. Some even see themselves as servants of God, though a fair number of Pipers believe in nothing at all. It takes a special kind of deadness, after all, to sell people for a living. And though the original cargo traditionally consisted of African prisoners or European convicts, today's Pipers buy and sell *everyone*: Chinese children, American tourists, pretty girls from Eastern Europe, migrant workers from Central America, war refugees and curiosity seekers and religious pilgrims who happened to pick the wrong travel agency... there's a market for them all, and customers across the globe – occasionally Nephandic but typically mortal – will pay plenty to acquire their own human possessions.

The Golden Bull

Few things display the Nephandic sense of humor better than the gold bull on Wall Street and the cult that reveres it. A mocking allusion to the golden calf from Exodus, this statue was commissioned by a sect whose lineage goes back to the Florentine High Guild. Most members of the Golden Bull think they're part of some mortal fraternity. That's exactly what the Fallen want them to think. Nurturing an especially predatory strain of capitalism, the Golden Bull's sponsors throw massive parties and political fundraisers, buy influence throughout world governments, and even stage prayer rallies around the bull itself. Several prominent evangelists and talk-show hosts belong to the Golden Bull, spreading a prosperity gospel with nationalist overtones. Scared Sleepers – many of whom are victims of the Bull's economic policies – buy into that gospel, believing that they'll someday own a share of it too. That's ridiculous, of course, but it's a compelling lie.

In reality, the Golden Bull is an elite Infernalist cult. Only the most select members of that fraternity even learn about the cult's secret orgies and rituals, and even fewer get to enjoy them. Those who've demonstrated sufficient levels of callous profiteering (with additional incentives and rewards from Fallen tempters) are examined, tested, and provided with enough blackmailable indulgences to destroy them if need be. Only then are they invited to join the *Midas Key Society*, the secret club near the heart of the Bull. Supposedly, this Society controls financial matters worldwide... and many of its members, including several prominent Syndicate tycoons, believe as much. In reality, it's just another Hellfire Club, with members who are destroying everything they touch, along with whatever souls they might have had left. The real magick remains the province of three Nephandic pawn-masters, plus whatever power the various pawns possess. The Bull's true goal is corrupting influence, not Infernal Arts. The rituals are just for show... and, if a member steps out of line, for *tell*.

Nephandic Tactics

The Fallen didn't attain their position of power by being stupid. Although rival mages might occasionally cross spells with wild-eyed demon-cultists, such ploys are diversions for bigger things. When Nephandi want to accomplish some important goal, they typically use a mixture of the following tactics:

Indulgence

An oldie but a goodie, this tactic appeals to the target's desires. Vast knowledge? Great sex? A killer rack in any interpretation of that term? The Fallen have got what you want. And although disciplined souls might believe they're above such gambits, the Fallen can offer up ascetic pleasures too. A quiet mind? An unspoiled grove? The ability to dismiss carnal pleasures with a glance? Sure, they can get that for you. The price? No price – they're just doing you a favor. Of course, those favors add up, so when the friend needs a little favor too, it just seems like the right thing to do to give him what he wants...

Most people, though, are easier to tempt. Money? Fame? Security? Revenge? That car or guy or house or whatever else you've had your eye on all this time? It's yours. Why *shouldn't* you have it, after all? You have a *right* to enjoy yourself! The Fallen One offers up a slide, pours Crisco all over it, and then invites her target to hop on and slide down and... well, it's an

obvious game if you're not the person on that slippery slide. Everybody, though, wants *something*, and the Fallen are expert procurers. Typically, they don't have to do anything more. A person on that slip-n-slide has many opportunities to damn himself and make other folks miserable while he's doing so.

Deception

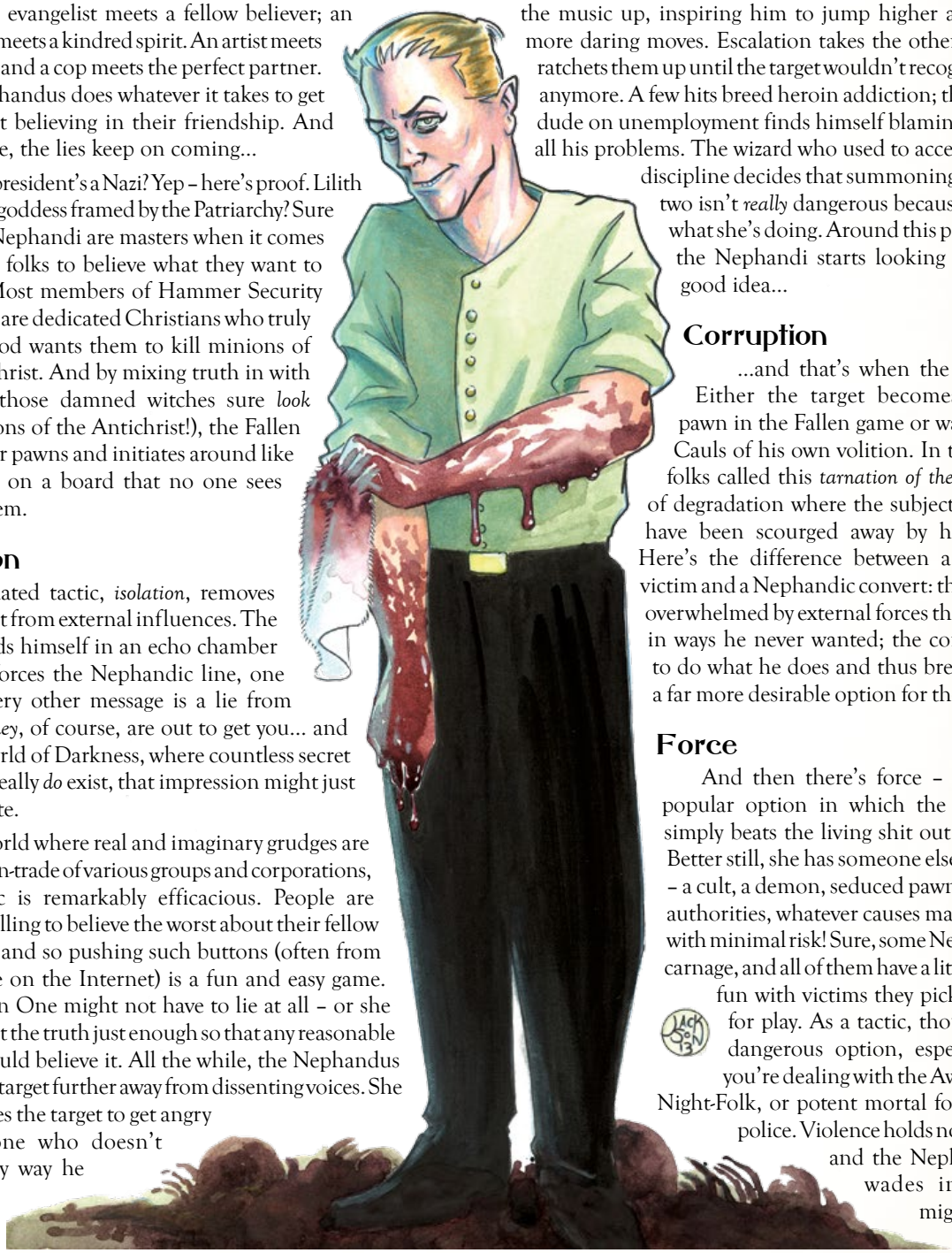
The Fallen rarely present themselves as who and what they really are. Unless a tempter's appealing to a teenage Satanist or something (and really, there's no lack of *those* in the World of Darkness!), she'll be whomever her target wants her to be. An evangelist meets a fellow believer; an anarchist meets a kindred spirit. An artist meets his Muse, and a cop meets the perfect partner. That Nephandus does whatever it takes to get that target believing in their friendship. And from there, the lies keep on coming...

The president's a Nazi? Yep – here's proof. Lilith was a love goddess framed by the Patriarchy? Sure she was. Nephandi are masters when it comes to getting folks to believe what they want to believe. Most members of Hammer Security Response are dedicated Christians who truly believe God wants them to kill minions of the Antichrist. And by mixing truth in with the lies (those damned witches sure *look* like minions of the Antichrist!), the Fallen move their pawns and initiates around like chessmen on a board that no one sees except them.

Isolation

A related tactic, *isolation*, removes the subject from external influences. The target finds himself in an echo chamber that reinforces the Nephandic line, one where every other message is a lie from Them. *They*, of course, are out to get you... and in the World of Darkness, where countless secret societies really *do* exist, that impression might just be accurate.

In world where real and imaginary grudges are the stock-in-trade of various groups and corporations, this tactic is remarkably efficacious. People are already willing to believe the worst about their fellow primates, and so pushing such buttons (often from a distance on the Internet) is a fun and easy game. The Fallen One might not have to lie at all – or she could twist the truth just enough so that any reasonable person could believe it. All the while, the Nephandus draws her target further away from dissenting voices. She encourages the target to get angry at everyone who doesn't think they way he does. You actually *believe* in gun control? You vote *Republican?* You eat meat or worship Jesus or follow a different sect of Islam than I do? *You're everything WRONG with the world!!!* Especially in the age of the Internet, this tactic is incredibly effective, and mages – being at least halfway isolated from the Sleepers to begin with – are especially vulnerable to it. This, more than any other tactic, allowed the Fallen to corrupt the Technocracy and Traditions without tipping their hand in the process.



Escalation

Once a Nephandus gets her monkey dancing, she speeds the music up, inspiring him to jump higher and perform more daring moves. Escalation takes the other tactics and ratchets them up until the target wouldn't recognize himself anymore. A few hits breed heroin addiction; the frustrated dude on unemployment finds himself blaming *THEM* for all his problems. The wizard who used to accept Hermetic discipline decides that summoning a demon or two isn't *really* dangerous because she knows what she's doing. Around this point, joining the Nephandi starts looking like a really good idea...

Corruption

...and that's when the trap closes. Either the target becomes a reliable pawn in the Fallen game or walks into the Cauls of his own volition. In the old days, folks called this *tarnation of the soul*: a level of degradation where the subject's old ideals have been scourged away by his activities. Here's the difference between a Nephandic victim and a Nephandic convert: the victim gets overwhelmed by external forces that break him in ways he never wanted; the convert *chooses* to do what he does and thus breaks *himself*... a far more desirable option for the Nephandi.

Force

And then there's force – a blunt but popular option in which the Nephandus simply beats the living shit out of her prey. Better still, she has someone else do it *for* her – a cult, a demon, seduced pawns, unwitting authorities, whatever causes maximum pain with minimal risk! Sure, some Nephandi *enjoy* carnage, and all of them have a little agonizing fun with victims they pick specifically for play. As a tactic, though, force is dangerous option, especially when you're dealing with the Awakened, the Night-Folk, or potent mortal forces like the police. Violence holds no guarantees, and the Nephandus who wades into a fight might not walk out under

The Cauls

Metaphysical black holes, the Cauls separate a mere Infernalist or pawn from the true Nephandi. Secured in hidden strongholds often called *Labyrinths*, Cauls resemble giant placentas, grotesque vaginas, or distorted organs of obscene function. Each Caul, it's been said, is a portal to the Absolute Void. If there really *is* a Great Chain of Being, then the Cauls are the space between those links.

A person must enter the Caul willingly. People who get shoved in against their wills die in sublime agony. The budding Nephandus suffers too... suffers excruciations beyond human imagination. In the end, however, he emerges from the Caul transformed. He might look just as he did before, but his mind and soul have turned inside out. From then on, the person he once was is lost.

Supposedly, a Caul is a one-way trip. You can't undo its effect in one lifetime. Folks who believe in redemption insist that reincarnation or Divine Grace can reverse the Caul's inversions; other mages point to the *widderslainte*, whose poisoned souls follow them through various incarnations. Whatever the truth might be, a Caul nurtures pain and gestates oblivion. The person who emerges from one has spent a season beyond Hell and bears that experience like a soul-brand through at least one lifetime, however long that life might be.

her own power. Thus, force is a last-resort tactic unless the Fallen have stacked the odds toward overwhelming success.

Dark Arts

To Nephandi, magick is the power of the Absolute. They channel the Void through their intentions and rites, and because that power comes directly from the End of All Things, it's theoretically more potent than any other form of magick. In game terms, of course, it's all the same thing. The Fallen, however, view their Arts as ultimate manifestations of nothingness.

Fallen mages embrace the most nihilistic paradigms imaginable: *Everything is Chaos, an Illusion*, a *One-Way Ride to Oblivion*. *Might is Right*, and anyone who can't accept that fact deserves to be prey for those who do. At the lower levels of experience, many Nephandi still hold onto dark beliefs: they're ultimate predators, warriors of Satan, brave inheritors of forbidden knowledge, and so forth. Those who survive to reach the higher (or *lower*) reaches of their Path, however, have such illusions torn away from them. The aswadim understand that they've become vessels for the Absolute, living avatars of cosmic oblivion.

Lesser Infernalists make pacts with malignant entities. Signing away bits of their souls, they assume handfuls of petty, hardly even magic powers. A few Awaken, but most do not. Given weird investments like goat legs or flaming breath, these Infernalists believe they have power but fall pathetically short of True Magick.

Awakened Nephandi are a different breed. The Caul seals their pact and Awakens them if they hadn't been Awakened before then. To them, power flows through the *Qlippoth*: the nine shells of the Spheres, regarded as the shadow side of Creation. Again, in game terms, these Qlippothic Spheres are exactly the same thing as the usual nine Spheres. A Fallen magus, however, regards those powers as the *Nine Keys to Hell*, or *Nine Shadows of the Absolute*, whose total essence forms the 10th Sphere, the Absolute. Supposedly, total understanding of each of these Fallen Spheres unlocks dark godhood and brings the seeker to a new level of existence which few have seen and from which no one can supposedly return.

Tools of Malficia

For the most part, Nephandi mages use the same tools as other mages: art, rituals, instruments, and activities that focus a mage's Will. For Nephandi and other Infernalists, however, those tools and actions become *malficia*: injuries, offenses, and crimes. And so, their tools and rituals concentrate on hurting people, twisting symbols, and inflicting as much harm as possible under the circumstances.

Although they also employ plenty of subtle tools – eye contact, soft words, caresses, and other apparently innocuous things – the primary ritual and castings of infernal mages take conventional tools and then drench them in blasphemy. Dances become obscene; prayers invoke demonic powers; self-sacrifice goes to horrific extremes, and as for the sacrifice of *others*... well, we'll simply say that the victims who get off with a dagger to the heart are the luckiest ones around. **(See the *Art of Desire, Dominion*, and *Malficia* entries in Chapter Ten, p.573-580.)**

Castings and Resonance

As the name implies, *malficia* is intended to harm people. Nephandi use their Arts to sow discord, weave temptations, produce enticing goods, charm people, and generally do things an honorable mage would not attempt. When necessary, infernal pyrotechnics – firestorms, black lightning, tornados, and so forth – back up more subtle Effects. Nephandi even heal people if it serves their purposes to do so... although the definition of healing, and the techniques involved, probably won't be very pleasant. (See, for instance, the ***New Youth Foundation***, above.)

As a result of both the mage's intentions and the Qlippothic energies behind these Arts, Fallen mages almost always leave tainted Resonance behind. Unless they take some measures to cloak their identities (and often even then), Nephandi magick creates a metaphysical bad taste in your mouth. The effects might be minor (chills in the air, wilted plants, weird buzzing sounds, and so on) but could get ugly (withered limbs, singing insects, a thick stench of brimstone, that sort of thing) when major magicks get involved.

Because Nephandi are master infiltrators, the Fallen prefer to avoid showy displays of Qlippothic Art. A true Black Mass is a rare thing in this group, and if one *is* staged, it's probably for the benefit of Satanist pawns or perverse thrill-seekers. In many cases, such mages prefer to use tools that seem innocuous: a black

Future Fate: Nephandic Victory...?

The idea that the Fallen are secretly pulling everyone else's strings is almost as old as **Mage** itself. It can be found between the lines from **The Book of Chantries** onwards and is stated outright in **Technocracy: Syndicate**, **Void Engineers**, and **Guide to the Technocracy**. That concept certainly explains large portions of the **Ascension** metaplot, not to mention the World of Darkness as a whole. Still, if you're not sure about perching your chronicle on the edge of corruption, you could assume one of the following options:

- **The Fallen are in charge:** Yep, they're winning. They run the Technocracy, influence the mortal world, and have taken the Traditions and Crafts to the brink of extinction. In **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** terms, the Wyrm's got this world in its coils and has damn near squeezed everything to death. Only a heroic effort from mages of all kinds can save the world, and things really don't look good.
- **The Nephandi have the upper hand:** They command frightening amounts of influence, poison the Inner Circle, and present the biggest challenge this world might face. Still, there's hope, and a determined resistance can hunt them down and drive them out.
- **The Nephandi are a minor threat:** The Council/ Union alliance successfully exiled the Fallen after World War II. Isolated pockets of Nephandi still exist, but a mage has more important things to worry about. The rotten state of the world is the Technocracy's fault or humanity's failure, not a Nephandic victory. They're scary but they don't run the show.

As always, Storytellers, keep your true choice secret from your players. That way, you'll add an edge of suspense to the tale. After all, they're reading this stuff too, and now that they've seen it *here*, they might start seeing Nephandi *everywhere*...

candle in the room, a perfume prepared with infant blood, a gun that's been used to murder a priest, and so forth. *Barabbi* mages use the same tools and rituals they'd employed before... though with slightly more extreme and destructive applications. The Progenitor who conducts particularly excruciating experiments and the Dreamspeaker who calls upon especially nasty spirits both embody the Nephandic approach to the Arts.

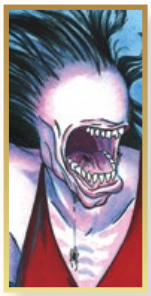
Remember that saying, "The end justifies the means?" That's how so many Nephandi get away with the things they do. It's especially obvious in the Technocracy, where Black Suits torture Reality Deviants as a matter of course or Pharmacopoeists drug kids up with psychoactive chemicals in order to get them to behave normally. It's true even in the mortal world, though, where rock stars talk about armed revolution or pundits shame people that their audience has been told to despise. When "extreme" is a marketing strategy and illusion becomes reality, it gets easy to slip malficia and other corruption into popular culture. Maybe it *is* really just talk, or only a game. But when hate and selfishness, violence and obscenity become real life... and perhaps they always *have* been that way... the tools and Arts of malficia become easy to employ.

Mages have always been extreme by nature... so if a certain mage is a bit more extreme than others, who's to say she's actually a Nephandus? Where and how do you draw the line unless you can see into her soul?

It's pretty hard to do that, really.

Which is why the Fallen are so *very* good at what they do...

Part ?*!: The Mad



"Sanity is a mask," she says. "It keeps your light inside so you don't wash away the air."

Witch-House unfurls her long tendril wings, glittering with spots of cobalt iridescence. The cloud of amber fireflies sends a jumble of soft-bright signals flashing across our chests. My bare skin tingles with the prickling light, cast across the contours in a liquid spray. Her antlers crackle with suppressed electricity.

"I used to swim through sanity," she adds, her voice drifting like worried flames. The fireflies pulse in time with her words. "Until I came to the bridge of glass. Under that bridge, I could hear words falling like leaves from a thousand trees, their stems cut loose by the inevitable blade." Witch-House tugs at the hem of her shadow, like a shy little girl in front of strangers. "They told me to let my light run free. So I opened my mouth and the fireflies came out."

Clumped around the edges of my sight, crowds of devoted souls gather, gleaming in our common madness. Around us, the air is melting, curling away from us like oil across water. Somewhere far away, the muffled voices scream like grass beneath a mower's blade. Witch-House glances through me. The amber lights skitter in the depths of her eyes. Each light, I see, is a galaxy dying in the pulse of an electric sun.

Beneath us all, the earth cries welcomes, praying for the deliverance we bring...

Uncertain Principles

In a mad world, madness becomes sanity.

And let's be honest – our world is crazy.

The dementia of our age is obvious: the removal from our primal roots, the complex interplay of technological consumption, the fear-based marketplace blasting perpetual alarms into every sense we possess. From the kaleidoscope madness of sensory overload to the lockout isolation of self-absorbed withdrawal, our world feels like Humpty Dumpty on a one-way trip with gravity. Naked emperors dictate our self-image, casting out a hall of mirrors that reflect nothing resembling the truth. Like monkeys in a nitro lab, we appear to exist on a constant verge of self-annihilation.

In such a world, the Mad Ones may be the sanest folks of all.

Magick itself is a form of madness, too. In order to perform it, a mage must possess – or be possessed *by* – an understanding of reality that defies the current standard. He or she must believe so strongly in a personal vision that the vision in question becomes reality. The language of pathology has words for conditions like that: *Schizophrenia*. *Delusion*. *Disconnection*. *Sociopathy*. The human animal fears people whose reality overrules their own... and with good reason, too. Madness can be terrifying, especially when it reaches out to change your world.

And so, the Marauders exist in a Zen state of paradox: enlightened mages embracing sanity through perpetual dementia. Whether they choose that state consciously or have it chosen *for* them by forces beyond their control is a question for philosophers. The Mad Ones simply *ARE*: they *exist*, they are *mad*, and their madness is both singular (each Marauder is a reality unto himself) and collective (they all share a similar connection through their *dis*connection from everybody else) all at once.

Straight Shooting

In game terms, all Marauder characters exist in a permanent state of ***Quiet*** – the magickal insanity detailed in **Chapter Ten**, **pp. 554-561**. Unlike other mages, they can't recover from this state. Although a given Marauder might slide up or down the Quiet scale (see the sidebar ***How to Make Yourself Mad***, below), he's stuck on the cracked side of the reality mirror. That condition grants Marauders a sense of tragic terror mixed with an apparent – though not perfect – immunity to Paradox. Because they themselves are paradoxical, these mages carry around their own personal reality zones... and when their zones override everyday reality, really weird shit occurs.

For the most part, Marauders are personified plot devices, tossing out the usual rules whenever they appear. Although a brave Storyteller might allow player-character Marauders (again, see the related sidebar), the Mad Ones typically arrive, drop a boatload of havoc in the middle of a story, and then disappear, leaving a mess for the main characters to clean up. Such living catastrophes work best when they serve as dramatic devices. The more bound by rules she is, the less mysterious and frightening a Marauder becomes.

The Mad Ones alter the landscape whenever they appear, so a little bit of them goes a long way. Even so, Marauders can inject pathos, horror, satire, and tragedy into your chronicle. Used carefully, they could even bring in a bit of comedy, although the Storyteller should avoid "Clown-Shoes Marauder Syndrome" (see the sidebar ***Running Wyld***), if only because such goofiness trivializes mental illness and the dramatic potential of Marauder characters. Although they excel at wrecking stuff, the Chaos Mages also provide a cracked-mirror perspective on magickal existence... a perspective that becomes far more clear when that crazy-quilt walking bazooka suddenly reveals his innate humanity and the fate that might greet any mage whose grasp of reality slips too far.

Confused? Join the club. By definition, Marauders confound definition. Complex antibodies to the disease of rationality, they're less *ir*rational than *counter*-rational – uncertain principles hovering in a six-dimensional cat-box suspending life and death and all things in between. The more you try to quantify them, the more you find yourself chasing shaggy-dog tales that in some sense grow from the base of your own spine.

In short, Marauders are the clap of single nonexistent hands whose echoes penetrate all layers of the Real.

Putting aside the puzzles for a moment, each Marauder is essentially a universe of one – a mage so disconnected from Consensus Reality that he functions in bubble of self-contained cosmos. Sometimes, that cosmos fits so neatly into the Consensus that the Marauder remains inconspicuous until he does something that reveals his true nature; at other times, a Marauder moves so far beyond the Consensus that her mere presence within Consensual Reality melts its borders and makes its colors run. Like mundane mental illness, a Marauder's madness slips between the cracks of the world around that person, either seeping in and rotting the surroundings through slow disintegration or else settling into the vulnerable areas and then cracking them like a sudden freeze through deep-set currents of ice.

Metaphysically speaking, Marauders appear to be agents of Dynamic chaos. All mages change reality, but the Wyld Ones become change incarnate. If Technocrats personify Stasis, Nephandi embody Entropy, and the Traditions and Disparates follow Paths of Balance, then the Mad ride the winds of Dynamism through the structures that get set up and torn down by the other factions. Flux, not structure, is their essential nature. Although they might nestle in the broken corners of our world, their activities disrupt the Tapestry wherever they appear.

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In the Kingdom of the Mad, All Men are Sane

Madness has been with us always, whirling on the edges of intellect and art. The insights of consciousness contain seeds of chaos too. If imagination is the gift of human sentience, then that same imagination can turn back upon itself, burying its fangs and emptying its poison into the very thing that makes it work. Just as magick, faith, and technology allowed the human species to ascend from rough beginnings, so too did insanity undermine those achievements. Maybe that's a lesson to us all: *don't get too proud, because pride can bring the whole thing down on your head.* Or perhaps it's just a built-in flaw... or, worst of all, the true measure of Enlightenment: the madness waiting on the edge of understanding.

Drifting From the Baseline

What do we mean by "madness"? Essentially, it's a disconnection so profound that it becomes dangerous. An insane person – Marauder or otherwise – endures a mental state in which consciousness and perception become their own worst enemies. *Baseline reality* – the shared fiction that most of us agree is real – drifts away from that person; she

perceives and reacts to a different reality than the one most people experience. That disconnection could be as drastic as gibbering hallucinatory mania or as subtle as an obsession that devours every other priority. **(For details, see *Baseline Reality* in Chapter Ten, p. 554.)**

Madness is part of the human condition. Everyone has a bit of it, and mages have more of it than most folks. Throughout history, people have regarded dementia as a backhanded blessing from powers beyond human comprehension. Sages, seers, and prophets are essentially insane by most standards, if for no reason other than their expanded perceptions and bizarre devotions. As a result, crazy people have often been seen as "touched" – by gods, by faeries, by exposure to some great and secret truth that mortal minds are too fragile to withstand. And though those things might not be true of the average mentally disturbed person, they're certainly true of the Marauders. The things that brand them as dangerously un-sane also reflect a deeper level of Awakening. It's been said that the Mad Ones are the most truly Enlightened mages alive... and that observation might even be correct.

Historically, the term *maraud* comes from a name given to wild tomcats and, by extension, to vagabonds who attack without warning and leave devastation behind. When a pack of 11th-century Chaos Mages attacked the Hermetic Covenant of Fuar Drochit, turning the stones to flowers and setting fire to the wells, one chronicler referred to them as "*ravaging marauds like unto the mad*"... and both names stuck. Since then, many other upheavals – some featuring coordinated efforts, most based in the actions of one or two high-powered Marauders – have burned the Mad Ones into the collective memory of Awakened society. Even the Nephandi, normally fond of chaos, fear the unpredictable Chaos Mages... perhaps because no other faction, not even the Technocracy, suffers more violence at their hands.

Perception and Actualization

Folks who study Marauders often divide them into two categories: *actualized Marauders*, who externalize their delusions and reshape the world around them with that madness; and *perceptual Marauders*, who internalize their delusions and move inconspicuously among the Masses. The first type is more obviously dangerous, the second type more ominous because you never know just who or where they are.

Actualized Marauders warp reality in their vicinity, inspiring the chaos that makes Wyld Mages so fearsome. Such mages tend to pull other people – Sleepers and Awakened alike – into the *sanity sinks* that well up around them. These often-unwilling allies add to the localized insanity, especially when they start believing more in the Marauder's vision of reality than in the one they inhabited a few moments earlier. This phenomenon, in turn, often creates more Marauders... madness, in such cases, is indeed contagious.

Perceptual Marauders keep their madness inside, often without knowing that they are, in fact, insane. Such Mad Folk remain under the radar, trickling out their craziness in small but meaningful ways. One might envision herself as a secret agent in enemy territory, playing a role that could cost her life; another believes himself to be the reincarnation of John the Baptist, seeking a reborn Christ; and a third strips off her clothes and introduces herself as the Train Goddess, assuring the rush hour crowd that they're all in good hands with her. A handful of these Marauders suppress magick with their mere presence, ironically enforcing the Consensus to which they don't actually belong.

The apparent leaders of Marauder bands – folks who, in recent years, seem to have become more common – tend to follow the perceptual mode; their reality includes other Marauders, but they're sane enough to function among the Masses and direct their madder cousins through working strategies. The infamous Robert Davenport (again, see below) is one of these midnight rabbits, moving through everyday reality with the insight of a Marauder seer. In the aftermath of the Avatar Storm (assuming that it ever occurred), these silent Marauders make up the majority of the Earthbound crew, and the more overt Marauders remain on the far side of the Gauntlet, bursting through for quick errands and often burning out in the process.

Regardless of their particular insanity, the Marauders as a whole seem to play out a mad masque, whose nature remains hidden even to them... and though their mortal selves remain clouded by that defining madness, their Awakened souls display a form of sanity whose implications leave other mages cold.

Rhymes Without Reason

So *is* there a Marauder endgame? What, if anything, looks like Ascension for the Mad? That's one of countless enigmas. You see, there doesn't appear to be any rhyme or reason behind this loose-knit faction. They have no headquarters, no gospel, no council, protocols, or spokesmen beyond the eerie fellowships they occasionally form with like-minded lunatics. Unlike those other factions, the Mad Ones hold no reliable influence among the Masses. An *individual* Marauder might be rich or powerful, but she doesn't dictate strategies for the group as a whole. One Chaos Mage might view Ascension as communion with the Child-Soul of Jupiter, whereas another views himself as damned to a Hell where everyone is dead and he'll always lose... and yet, he cannot simply surrender to hopelessness because *enough* faith might just win his salvation after all. There *is* no apparent uniting goal, perhaps because Marauders – like many questing mystics – regard the journey, not the destination, as the ultimate Enlightenment.

Despite their collective name (a name imposed by others, almost never accepted by the Mad Mages themselves), each Marauder is a faction of one. And this singular perspective might be the purest view of the Cosmic Mystery. The other groups and factions could be seen as filters for a transcendent Truth too vast and terrible for the human mind to conceive without breaking. Marauders, though, have no such filters... or, if they *do*, then the filters are internally chosen, not externally imposed. These mages have seen something behind the sun, peeked beyond the masks of Divinity, puzzled out the riddle at the end of the universe... and that insight has driven them to a sanity that appears as madness to everybody else.

The Tragedy of Madness

Folks who see only the crazy side of Marauderdom miss a simple, vital fact: *underneath the madness, every Marauder is an Enlightened human being who got burned by cosmic Truth*. Each one, then, is a person who had dreams, loved ones, aspirations, and a life... and might perhaps, in some strange way, still have them. In most cases, the Mad have children, mates, lovers, friends, comrades. Insanity might have driven wedges between those mages and their companions, but those ties were there once and probably still linger inside the madness.

So when the vortices of reality-warping bugfuckery start sweeping away the Consensus, there's still a human being wrapped up in that storm. That fact doesn't excuse the things a Marauder does or make him any more moral or good (human beings, as a rule, are pretty awful), but it renders that force of insane devastation *tragic* in the classic sense of that term: an example of greatness brought low by disaster, evoking pity and fear in all those who behold his fate. And it's that sense of tragedy which makes Marauders the cracked mirrors of the Awakened world – fearsome examples of the treacherous Path all mages pursue.

Fusions, Cabals, Confluxes, and Solitary Madness

Unlike the other factions, the Mad have neither rank nor organization within their collective dementia. Although a few Mad Ones might hold titles like *the Obsidian Archduke* or *Resplendent Dragon of the Thousand Tongues*, Marauders live in their own mad little worlds.

Even so, certain types of loose confederations exist within the Wyld world. Classified by outsiders, these rough bands of cooperative lunacy collect like-minded crazies into effective (if often temporary) groups:

Cabals

Like other mages, the Mad often gather into small, sympathetic groups geared toward common purposes. In such cases, the Marauders share just enough communal insanity or cause to unite them for short-term collaboration. A Mad cabal (sometimes called a *hatch*, *murder*, *pack*, *mosh*, *knot*, or *storm*) tends to gather around a central focus – perhaps a shared origin, enemy, or concept of reality – mitigating the various Quiets of its individual members long enough for those mages to cooperate with one another. Witch-House, for example, tends to attract allies and followers through her messianic charisma; many of her followers get swept up in her firefly gospel, sometimes Awakening through the revelations she brings. As a result, Witch-House often brings a few allies with her when she appears in public, generating

a cult of weirdness that turns many of her prophecies into headlines on the next news report.

Fusions

A shared Quiet – often generated by a single experience – can instigate a *fusion*: a group of Marauders whose insanities mesh well enough to link them together. A group of kids Awakened by Witch-House, for instance, might share her view of the world... or perhaps a perspective that's not *quite* like the one she experiences but exactly like the one shared by that fusion's individuals. Essentially a Mad collective, each fusion group shares a mental bond between each member, allowing those mages to speak without words, finish each other's sentences, understand one another's madness, and act with the barely-conscious instincts of a wolf pack. According to Hermetic theory, fusion Marauders share a common Avatar or perhaps dance on the strings of several collaborating Avatars, united toward a purpose the mages themselves do not understand.

Confluxes

More often, the Mad get drawn into subconscious flash mobs of common purpose. Essentially, strangers come together through forces of probability, subconscious cues, or outside influence from a greater source. Those strangers act in separate yet collaborative fashion and then go their separate ways, often unaware that they've just shared an experience with their fellow Marauders. No one's quite sure exactly *what* it is that causes a conflux of Marauders to form, but the results can be quite disconcerting. If Witch-House, Pillory, Mother Goose, and the Wyld Ones all collided in the same space – each unaware of the other party's presence – the inevitable chaos would signify a conflux.

Unlike fusions and cabals, a conflux holds no common perception of reality. Its members might not even realize that the other ones are involved in whatever madness they create. Again, the individual Avatars probably have some covert agenda in place; to the mages involved, however, those actions remain as mysterious to the Marauders as they do to the outsiders they affect.

Ringleaders

A handful of Mad ringleaders seem to understand the weird forces that unite Marauders; Robert Davenport may be the most notorious ringleader, although the unknown parties behind the *Bai Dai* and the *Sitrin* appear to share his ability to steer Wyld Mages in collective directions. Those secrets, however, may be the exclusive province of the Mad. Other non-Marauder mages have tried to guide Marauder groups toward a desired purpose... and without exception, those experiments go poorly for everyone concerned.

Solitary Madness

For the most part, though, Marauderdom appears to be a solitary Path. Despite the occasional collectives that form and dissolve among the Mad, the various Quiets that define this condition lead to alienation. An individual Marauder might share the occasional errand or community, but unless she belongs to a fusion, that situation is almost always temporary. This faction is composed largely of individuals whose Paths intertwine just enough to earn an imposed label from outsiders who'll never understand what goes on at the cracked side of the mirror.

Mad Tactics

When the Mad Ones go to war, their arsenals range beyond physical weapons (guns, bombs, spiked clubs, and so forth) and mere magickal destruction. The tactics that have bedeviled other mages for roughly a thousand years include certain refinements that only the Mad understand. Other mages can observe them, study them, occasionally even mimic them, but can never employ them with the surety of the Mad.

(For the associated game systems, see the sidebar ***Tactics and Rules***.)

Paradox

Rumor has it that Marauders are immune to Paradox, but that's not quite true. Although their madness shields them from its worst effects (see ***How to Make Yourself Mad*** for details), the Wyld Mages *do* invoke Paradox energies. It's just that the backlash tends to hit someone else. And that's how the Mad Ones use Paradox as a weapon.

Marauder Quiet insulates a mage from Paradox backlash; deep Quiet provides thick insulation. Like lightning, the energies and backlash seek a conductive target – and non-Marauder mages make great lightning rods. Thus, truly crazy Marauders invoke wildly vulgar magicks, and then they stand by while some other mage takes the backlash. That trick never gets old... unless, of course, you're the mage playing Ben Franklin's Key in a Marauder's thunderstorm.

Sanity Sinks

Madness is contagious. When a powerful Marauder sets up shop, her madness soon overwhelms the local sense of reality. People begin to see themselves the way that the Marauder sees them, like actors in her personal passion play. *Her* delusions become *their* delusions. The cop directing traffic suddenly sees himself as a 1st-century centurion; the kids playing Frisbee become, in their own minds, ragged beggars tossing around a dead cat; the fast-food cashier imagines himself as a naked slave in the kitchen of some demented, giant clown. For the most part, these sanity sinks affect Sleepers more than they affect mages; really potent madness, though, can overwhelm even a mage's sense of reality.

Such sanity sinks begin with a sense of creeping weirdness; little things favor the Marauder's perception of them, rather than the normal way they appear to the sane folks in the Marauder's sink. Soon madness, as the song says, takes its toll. Although a perceptual Marauder – one whose Quiet stays inside of her – doesn't radiate this reality warp, a strong actualized Marauder can soon turn other people crazy, if only for a little while. In extreme cases, these converts can become long-term allies, cultists, or even – if they Awaken – new Marauders.

How to Make Yourself Mad: Marauder Characters

Under most circumstances, it's best to leave Marauders as Storyteller characters. This way, the Storyteller gets to decide what a Marauder can and cannot do and sidesteps the potential headaches of Paradox-resistant player characters.

That said, a strong and ethical roleplayer *COULD* evoke some fascinating stories by facing the challenge of a mage who goes Marauder and feels his world slip away. Given the right gaming troupe, this *MIGHT* provide dramatic tension and a host of roleplaying challenges. Therefore, we offer the following suggestions to players and Storytellers who can approach the subject with balance and creativity.

Quiet Intensity

First of all, read the extensive rules for ***Quiet*** given in **Chapter Ten**, as well as the Marauder-specific rules presented in this section. For gameplay purposes, an Awakened character who enters Quiet and reaches Level 6 may go Marauder at the Storyteller's discretion. At that point, the mage either becomes a Storyteller character and the original player makes a new mage, or the mage becomes a player-run Marauder *IF the Storyteller allows that as an option*. In both cases, the mage is permanently buggo. Unless the Storyteller allows for a miraculous recovery, that character goes 'round the bend and becomes one of the Mad.

Once the character has become a Marauder, his original Quiet gets switched out for Marauder Quiet: he's *always* insane now, but the degree of that insanity depends upon the degree of his Marauder Quiet. That Trait, however, can go up and down, depending on the events within the story. Certain things may drive the character *more* sane or *less* sane, but he's never totally sane in the usual sense of things.

A Marauder's base Quiet depends upon that mage's usual disconnection from Consensus Reality. Robert Davenport, for instance, is pretty lucid: he can interact with most of the world, though he remains convinced that his wife and daughter are still alive and that his Avatar is actually his wife (who occasionally speaks through him). At times, he views his surroundings as a faerie-tale landscape in which he's the hero. Davenport's base Quiet, then, is low – between 2 and 3, depending on his situation. Pillory, on the other hand, remains wrapped in an eternal nightmare that's disconnected from anything like baseline reality. Her base Quiet, then, is 5 – grossly distorted in every way imaginable. Such Marauders are merely a step or two away from complete metaphysical dis-integration. A permanent rise above that level will destroy them.

Marauder Quiet

Quiet Trait	Degree of Insanity
1	One or two minor disassociations from baseline reality. Very few Marauders are this sane.
2	A few simple but notable differences between the Mad One's reality and the reality experienced by other characters. Davenport, for example, refuses to believe that his family is long dead.
3	Major breakdown between the Marauder's perceptions and the rest of reality. Perhaps the mage lives in a fantasy vision of the Roaring '20s or believes that she's a concubine in medieval Songhai. Although the Mad One still views herself as human in a human world, that world must be translated by her Avatar – from its normal state into the world that she experiences.
4	Grotesque distortions of time, space, identity, and form. The Marauder perceives a reality that's *related* to the normal one, but it has many significant differences that the Avatar must "translate" before she can interact with the world at large.
5	Welcome to Wonderland! The Marauder's reality is nothing like the rest of the world; everything she perceives gets wildly distorted if and when she perceives it at all.
6+	Consensual Reality ejects the Marauder into the Umbra. Exiled beyond Consensus Reality, the Mad One exists only in distant Otherworldly Realms. If she gets any madder than this, she'll drop out into the Deep Umbra. What happens after *that* is a mystery for the ages. Theory holds that Marauders who Ascend to this degree of madness become veritable gods within the Onerae Dream Realms. Oddly enough, Marauders of Quiet 5 or higher appear to be immune to the effects of Disembodiment. Does that mean that physical existence is tied to forms of sanity, or that some forms of madness transcend physical existence...?

Cults, Allies, and Disruption

Lunacy loves company. Especially in a world that's crazy to begin with, Marauders often find themselves with kindred spirits whose vision of reality fits their own. Actualizing Marauders tend to grow their own cults and networks, whereas perceptual Marauders attract friends, lovers, and would-be saviors.

Although many Wyld Ones fit the lone whacko stereotype, others gather cults and alliances from among the Masses, the Night-Folk, and occasionally even among other mages who might not realize that their friend is one of the Mad.

Silent Marauders often become agents of disruption, joining other factions, earning the trust and affection of their comrades, and then bringing the whole thing down on everybody's heads. Naturally, this tactic requires an illusion of sanity on the part of a Marauder – obviously demented ones cannot infiltrate such organizations. As the saying says, however, it's always the quiet ones (or perhaps the ones in Quiet...) that you have to look out for. Perceptual Marauders, or ones whose Quiet allows a fair measure of interaction with the world at large, can infiltrate a group and then blow it up or tear it down from the inside out. (For an example, see the character Hive in **Appendix I**.)

Zooterrorism

And then there's the Marauder specialty: zooterrorism, also known as dropping a manticore on your neighbor's doorstep, ringing the bell, and running away laughing. Granted, the doorstep is probably the local Technocratic Construct, the manticore won't survive the experience, and the Paradox will drop a metaphysical anvil on *somebody's* head from a great height... but really, this sort of thing creates a memorable impression, so it's got a long and honorable pedigree among the Mad.

Magickally speaking, a zooterrorist Marauder opens up a portal between the Earth and an appropriate Otherworldly Realm, calls a Bygone through the gate, and lets nature take its course. Compassionate Marauders often stick around to even the odds between the rampaging beastie and the local Technocrats, but more callous Mad Folk (like the Bai Dai) simply let chaos rule the day. The near-inevitable Paradox backlashes, meanwhile, pound unlucky mages into the pavement, which just adds to the overall effect of a pissed-off dragon at the local Progenitor lab. Although the Avatar Storm makes this tactic more dangerous than usual, powerful Marauders still resort to zooterrorism when nothing less than a harpy swarm will send the desired message.

Reality Vortices and the Bigfoot Effect

On the flipside, a powerfully actualized Marauder can skew the localized reality in such powerful ways that even technology

Running Wyld

Whether or not a player gets to keep his character after a mundane Quiet level of 5 depends on the Storyteller's judgment. *Ultimately, the Storyteller decides.* If she decides to adopt the Marauder as a regular character, though, several important elements come into play:

Take Madness Seriously

If and when a mage goes Marauder, please leave the clown-shoes in the closet where they belong. Yes, gaming should be fun, but playing a Marauder for laughs cheapens insanity, Marauders, and your chronicle as a whole. Beyond that consideration, though, remember that Marauder madness is a *curse*, not a superpower. Real-life mental illness tends to have catastrophic effects on everyone involved, and it hinders people in many vital ways, from basic social interactions to the pervasive feeling that your entire life seems unreal.

On that topic, beware of emotional triggers in your gaming group. Insanity qualifies as mature content, and it's not suitable for all **Mage** groups. **Chapter Seven** offers suggestions about handling sensitive subjects in your game. Beyond the potential pitfalls of running an insane character in your chronicle, simply treat your Marauder like a human being whose life has been transformed by his disconnection from everyday reality. He might be checking into the Lovecraft Hotel, but he's still recognizably human... which, of course, provides all kinds of glorious dramatic potential for a great roleplayer to embrace.

Secretly Mad

Marauders and Nephandi top the mystic hit list. Most mages share a "kill on sight" perspective on the Fallen and the Mad, if only out of self-preservation. A continuing Marauder character (whether or not he's run by a player) should probably remain secret: the *players* might know that he's Mad, but the *characters* should not. Mages who willingly run with the Mad Ones soon have other Awakened folks gunning for the entire group. Sure, they might be sticking with their friend out of love or loyalty, but no other mage will care. Like the proverbial rabid dogs, those characters will be hunted down and wiped out. And so, the Mad One should be as subtle as his Quiet allows him to be. If he acts out too often, his comrades will be forced to put him down.

Who's Crazy?

Mage traditionally treats Marauders as forces of nature. Sometimes, though, a Mad Mage has deeper ties to the player group. Maybe he's a parent... or a neighbor... or a mentor, lover, or child. He might be a cabal-mate whose Quiet overcomes reality... or a long-time rival or enemy whose madness gives him a scary new edge. A Sleeper associate might Awaken into Marauderdom or be pulled into a sanity sink by an insane mage. In short, a Marauder can be anyone... and almost anyone could go Marauder, too. As the Joker says in *The Killing Joke*, all it takes is one bad day... and the World of Darkness is *full* of really bad days.

Tactics and Rules

Marauder characters invoke special rules. Although the main rule systems are described in **Book III**, we've presented those special Marauder rules here for easy reference. For details about the rules themselves, see **Chapters Eight**, **Nine,** and **Ten**.

Paradox and the Mad

Marauder characters enjoy a certain relationship with Paradox and its effects:

- **Reduced Paradox:** Even on a botched roll, coincidental magick cast by a Marauder character does not invoke Paradox. If she uses vulgar magick, she remains immune to the usual automatic point or two of Paradox but takes the usual Paradox that's based upon the highest Sphere involved in that spell. Backlashes are handled normally. **(For details, see p. 502, and remember that coincidental magick is relative.)**
- **Quiet Insulation:** Every point in Marauder Quiet insulates that character from five points of backlash. A character with Quiet 3, then, is immune to 15 points of backlash, whereas one with Quiet 5 is immune to 25 points.
- **Bounced Backlash:** *Other* mages – perhaps even unAwakened characters – in the vicinity suffer the effects of a Marauder's Paradox backlash. Those backlashes tend to invoke explosions, time-freezes, angry Paradox Spirits, insect swarms, rains of blood, Paradox Realms, and other area-effect phenomena. In most cases, Marauder backlashes fit the madness of the Marauder who caused that Paradox.
- **Compounded Insanity:** When a Marauder's player botches a vulgar magick roll, that character's Quiet increases by one. As an *optional rule*, the Quiet might increase by one level for each 1 that gets rolled.
- **Recovery?:** For each week that the Marauder spends with characters who do not share her delusions, that compounded insanity fades by one level. *This recovery, however, does not reduce the Quiet below its usual base level.* A Quiet 3 character whose botches earn her two additional levels of Quiet can return to Quiet 3 but not go below that level. She's *better* but still not *sane*.

gets drawn into the dance. Video cameras, cell phones, and other recording devices shut down (a common occurrence), record indistinct blurs of unidentifiable activity, or else transform completely into related but dissimilar objects – say, an iPad into a clay tablet and stylus – before transforming back to their original configuration once the Mad One leaves the scene.

Such reality vortices help conceal a Marauder's existence and activities as well as subvert reality with the *Bigfoot effect*: that annoying cryptozoology quirk that blurs images of Nessie, Bigfoot, and UFOs that appeared with perfect clarity when photographers took their pictures. Whether this means

Optional Rule: Sanity Sinks

As the main text says, Marauder delusions can be contagious. As an *optional rule*, certain actualized Marauders can infect other people with their madness.

- **Creeping Weirdness:** Whenever an actualized Marauder spends a few minutes in the presence of otherwise sane Sleepers, the players for those characters should make Perception + Awareness rolls, difficulty 6. If a player rolls successfully, the character retains her usual perspective. If the player fails, the character begins to drift into the Marauder's way of seeing things, adopting the Mad One's delusions as her own. And if the player botches, then the bystander immediately enters the Marauder's weird little world... and doesn't find anything unusual about that at all!
- **Lure of Dementia:** If an actualized Marauder spends a scene or more in the presence of other sane characters (other mages, Sleepers, Night-Folk, etc.), the Storyteller rolls the Marauder's Arete while the players of those other characters roll their Willpower. This is a contested roll, with a difficulty of 6 for all players.

If the Marauder wins the contest, each success for the Marauder converts one Willpower point from the other characters to the Marauder's viewpoint. Once every point of a given character's Willpower has been converted, that character enters the Marauder's Quiet – seeing what he sees as the Marauder sees it. Essentially, mages become temporary Marauders (*without the usual benefits*), and non-mages become cultists of the Mad One.

Usually, the other players roll once per scene. Physical touch – especially prolonged contact – from the Marauder forces the targeted player to roll each *turn*.

- **Insanity Clause:** *Neither this creeping madness nor the lure of dementia affect Night-Folk who are already insane.* Malkavian vampires, Black Spiral Dancer werewolves, other Marauders, psychotic hunters, ghosts, mummies, and fae of all kinds remain totally immune to those delusions. Other characters can resist the effects by exerting Mind 1 magick or by invoking mental Disciplines or Gifts to protect their minds against the madness.
- **Regaining Sanity:** Once a character leaves the Marauder's presence, the madness starts to fade. Generally, a character can regain her sanity by the end of a given story unless the Mad One has been reinforcing those delusions. (See below.) Other characters can bring that person's sanity back more quickly through Mind magick or other forms of therapy, but prolonged madness might demand prolonged recovery.
- **Sanity Sink Merit:** If the Storyteller allows Marauder player-characters, then the sanity sink effect must be purchased as a 7-point Merit. This is not an automatic gift for every Mad Mage.

Demented Revelations

Through horrific, seductive, or other engaging methods, a Mad One can try to blast another character's sanity using the ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** option described in **Chapter Nine**, **p. 407**. This sort of coercive madness involves roleplaying and Storytelling and can provide really dramatic episodes in your chronicle. Obviously, it tends to deepen the effects of a sanity sink, leaving mental scars that might never heal.

that Consensus Reality smoothes out little wrinkles or that Marauders were involved with some of history's more notorious cryptozoological events (they probably were...) remains open to debate. In any case, certain Wyld Mages *do* tend to warp reality on a technological scale. Although the Traditions, Disparates, and Technocracy wind up having to conceal Marauder incidents on a fairly regular basis, the Bigfoot effect appears to nullify a multitude of sins.

Magick and the Mad

Marauder madness blows open a person's sense of possibility. Whereas other mages study practices handed down through mentors and fellowships, the Mad often manifest wild powers through explosions of enlightened potential. Aside from the Awakened mages who go Wyld, Marauders display the sort of power that saner mages work years or even decades to achieve.

Wild Talent

In a spontaneous burst of expanded dementia, a Mad One can rip holes in the Gauntlet or split into half a dozen self-aware selves. How? Through ***Wild Talent***, described in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 527-528), as "a sudden burst of controlled (and uncontrollable) magick." This talent essentially runs wild, dragging the mage along to clean up the mess. For most mages, such displays happen once or twice in a lifetime, if even that often; for certain Marauders, though, they're a way of life.

In game terms, this sort of magick is the Storyteller's playground. She can have it do whatever seems most dramatic at the time, leaving the Marauder's normal magick to the usual rule systems. Again, see that **Chapter Ten** entry for details.

Insane Focus

For the average mage, belief provides the foundation for the willworker's focus. Practices and tools help the mage guide that belief toward magickal acts. For the Mad, however,

Enlightened insanity provides the focus. A Marauder's Arts well up from that crazy-pool, and so she might not use instruments or practices at all – just explosions of demented Will.

That said, most Mad Ones *do* use practices and tools... typically ones that make sense only to each individual Marauder. One might use words, another uses toys, and a third employs chalk drawings that she scribbles onto notebook paper and then chews up before vomiting a spell. As always, the focus depends upon the insanity. A Mad Mage uses things that fit into his personal view of reality.

Mages who go Mad after belonging to other groups typically retain their original beliefs, tools, and practices. Now, however, those instruments and paradigms get warped in bizarre ways. A Virtual Adept Marauder might use broken computer gear or an Etch-a-Sketch; a Hermetic could employ obsessive glyphs and chants of insane complexity and fifth-dimensional math. A Mad Ecstatic could eat bugs, and a Mad Progenitor makes Dr. Frankenstein look like Neil DeGrasse Tyson. Those Mad Ones still practice magick, but it's a bent form of their original practice, reflecting their permanent delusions.

Marauder Resonance

The Mad weave their madness into everything they do. As a result, each Marauder has powerful Resonance, rippling the Tapestry with lunatic phenomena. Actualized Marauders send out mad echoes: weird quirks of the environment, strange weather, bent musical notes that come from no visible instrument, and other twists of Reality's tail. Perceptual Marauders, in contrast, send out tiny waves of unease and dread; such people *feel* wrong but don't distort reality in such obvious ways.

Eventually, though, the Madness becomes too strong for the Tapestry to endure. Low-key Marauders, like Davenport, might keep a low profile on Earth for years or even decades. Few Mad Ones, however, are that sane. More often than not, the truly powerful Marauders retreat into the Otherworlds, get swallowed up by Umbral Realms, or explode in brilliant flares of glorious insanity, projecting echoes of their dementia to the universe at large.

The Dream Lords: Marauder Oracles?

When Marauders reach a pinnacle of madness, their essence leaps from the confines of reality and soars into the Void. No force on Earth can hold them then – every element of flesh or spirit dissolves into the whirling Wyld. Sometimes, however, visitors to the *Onerae* – lasting Realms among the Dream Zone – report seeing strange gods whose wishes transform those dreamscapes to suit unearthly whims. Could these Dream Lords be Mad Oracles, advanced beyond material reality yet still held in the gravity of the Real? Given that the Dream Realms are the stuff of incarnated consciousness, the concept of Quiet Bodhisattvas within those Realms makes a certain degree of sense.

(For more about the Onerae, see *Lasting Realms* and *Dreaming Gods*, Chapter Four, p. 101)

The Mad Masque?

So what, if anything, does Ascension look like to the metaphysically insane? Is there a Path for the Mad that leads to some ultimate transcendence? Might the Marauders have a vision for the world at large? The answers – assuming they exist – remain mysterious to all but the maddest of seers... and because *they're* insane as well, their observations should be taken with several barges full of salt.

Still, there *do* appear to be forms of Ascension for escapees from reality's confinement. After all, the illusion of sanity can be a sort of prison from which Enlightenment allows release. What other people see as hopeless dementia might instead be transcendence from a Gnostic cosmos in which reality is a torturous delusion – a Mad Masque pretending to be real.

Perhaps, on an individual level, each Marauder gets a glimpse behind the scenes at this cosmic farce. It could be that this insight has driven them insane. It could also be, however, that such insight has made them the *SANEST* people in the World of Darkness. Paradoxically, *both* states may be true: sanity is madness, and the greatest Enlightenment burns too bright to be considered sane.

Ascension, then, is an eternal laugh at the cosmic joke, endless applause for the Mad Masque in which each living thing holds a role. Perhaps that one hand clapping at the end of the universe is the transcendent essence of the Great Marauder Soul. And if, after all these centuries of struggle and war, the Marauders really *do* have the last laugh, their collective punch line could involve ripping down the curtain that masquerades as the Tapestry... and revealing, in the end, that nothing is what it ever appeared to be at all.

Fragments of a Greater God

Clearly, the World of Darkness *is* a sick joke perpetrated upon its inhabitants. No divinity could be cruel enough to bestow a constant struggle of absurd miseries upon its children. As the theory goes, this cosmos is a sadistic toy crafted by insane gods. Beyond them, however, a vast Creator offers comfort to the prisoners of this Earthly prison... and the Mad Ones are his angels, ministering to the innocent souls caught up in this Gnostic thrill-ride. It's a weird theory, sure – but like we said, this world is insane, so who's to say that the Angels of the True God aren't actually sane folks whose Awakening allows them to see past the illusions of this rotten Earth and embrace a sanity that only *looks* like madness when you see it through our eyes...?

In a world torn apart by Ascension Warriors, perhaps madness really *is* the key to Ascension – an ultimate transcendence beyond this World of Darkness.

Chapter Six: Creating the Character

If you would create something, you must be something.
– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Seven of Cups

Associations: *Temptation; delusion; sensation; fantasy; illusions; withdrawal ...*

Slaughter laughed, then drained the last of the chocolate wine from his glass. "You really need to leave those losers you hang with and join with some real power, Iphigenia. You know my group would welcome you."

He looked attractive enough, with his long, fashionably shaggy black hair that fell into deep green eyes rimmed with kohl. Everything from fingernails to top hat was black. A few silver chains highlighted his Goth glory. She had once visited his apartment, a place where the only variation was the exact shade of black displayed on everything from his bed sheets to his toilet. She had laughed aloud when he asked her to hand him "that black thing."

Iffy smiled, amused by his conformity. Encouraged, he continued: "Come on, Iffy," he taunted. "Your problem is you don't believe in anything."

Now she was annoyed. Small and slightly chubby, with curly dark blond hair, pink cheeks, and sky-blue eyes that screamed of Midwestern corn-fed normalcy, she glared at him. Why did he bother with her anyway, when she dressed as she did? She preferred brilliant greens and pinks. And her roller skates – the old-fashioned kind that tightened with a key, fit over her high, green boots. Several gold pocket watches woven together with red and pink roses sat atop her abundant curls.

"Actually," she snapped, "you are totally wrong. As usual. It isn't that I believe in 'nothing;' it's that I believe in everything. Or at least, the possibility of everything."

She leaned closer. "I believe in freedom, in romance, in dreams and great struggles against seemingly unbeatable foes and glorious victories that give us all the right to be who we are without apology."

He laughed louder. "Seriously? You sound like you're about to break into some Disney intro theme-song!"

"And you don't approve." Iffy sat back, twirling her hair, plucked one of the roses from her homemade tiara, and began to denude it one petal at a time.

"Not really," he admitted. "No."

"Goodbye, Slaw." She pulled the petals clean in a single sweep of her fingertips. "Sorry, but you bore me."

Smiling sweetly one last time, she rose gracefully from the café table. Lifting her brilliant crimson parasol to shade her from the sun, she skated away down the grimy city street while Slaughter sat at the table, looking as though he'd just lost something but couldn't put his finger on what it might have been.

The Human Side of Power

You're not helpless. If a single sentence could sum up **Mage: The Ascension**, it would be that one. No matter who you're playing or how hopeless your struggle appears, your mage is never without some degree of power. And so, as you create your Awakened alter-ego, remember this: Your mage can make things happen, even in the most awful circumstances.

Although **Mage** is (in)famous for its metaphysical weirdness, it's the human core of each Awakened character that makes **Mage** truly compelling. Mages, regardless of alliance or affiliation, are passionate human beings: they love, they fear, they strive for huge and tiny goals. They feel emotions and sensations with an intensity that non-mages rarely understand. The Arts that define their powers also open their senses to perceptions far outside normal human experience – the first level of every Sphere, after all, reveals a rich new spectrum of reality. In the immortal words of Rob Zombie, mages are "more human than human," and they are all the *more* human because of that excellence.

It's the human side of power that brings **Mage**'s epic scope to an intimate human level. Without it, the Awakened Ones are just jumbles of complicated stats that pitch lightning around. The moral urgency of the Ascension War and its ponderous effects feel more vital when they're rooted in human needs. Just as we do, mages need to feel some measure of security, comfort, accomplishment and love in their lives. The skills they learn, the Arts they master, the groups they join, and the goals they pursue all reflect the things they want and need – the challenges they face and the tools they employ in order to meet those challenges.

In short, they're a lot like us.

Stages of Creation

Like the other large chapters in this book, this chapter has been divided up into several sections:

- **Part I: Creating Your Character** (pp. 254-265) covers the essential steps involved in crafting your new mage.
- **Part II: Character Traits** (pp. 266-335) presents the various game Traits that define what your character can and cannot do.
- **Part III: Character Progress** (pp. 335-339) shows the ways in which your mage can grow, change, and prosper.

Within those sections, other sections handle the other elements – most especially the different sorts of Traits and their related rules.

Some of the rules throughout the following chapter contradict the systems given in previous editions of **Mage**. Although your Storyteller will be the final arbitrator about the rules used in your particular **Mage** chronicle, consider the following rules to be official and definitive as far as the **Mage 20** series is concerned.

Before We Begin...

As you scan this chapter, noting the many Traits that'll define your mage in game terms, remember this: all of these Attributes, Skills, Backgrounds, and so on are innate parts of the human character you're creating. Like magick, they're extensions of the person who uses them. On a meta level, then, they're all extensions of *you*, as well. By keeping that personal connection to your character's human core, you'll take a bunch of abstract Traits and make them *real*.

There's a sort of power in that act... and yeah, a sort of magick, too.

Traits

Traits represent the in-game capabilities of your mage. Measured in dots – usually along a scale of 1 to 5 – they reflect the character's relative ability and tell you how many dice to roll when determining what your character can do. For each dot in the appropriate Trait, you take one die to determine your chance of succeeding at a given task. Added together, these dice become your ***dice pool*** (further detailed in Chapter Eight, p. 385). The more dots you have, the bigger your dice pool and the greater your ability.

Trait Ratings

When you build your **Mage** character, you spend certain amounts of points on various Traits. The exact amounts depend upon the Trait in question. We'll get into the specifics later on; for now, just remember that most Traits range between one dot and five dots. A zero-dot rating in a Trait reflects the total

absence of that characteristic, whereas six dots or more in an Ability, Attribute or Background reflects an inhuman degree of expertise. Certain Traits – Arete, Willpower, Quintessence, and Paradox – work on a different scale, ranging from 0 to 10. Aside from Willpower, non-mages don't have these Traits at all.

For the majority of your Traits, think of your character's abilities along this range:

X	No Capability
•	Poor/ Novice
••	Average/ Beginning Professional
•••	Good/ Experienced Pro
••••	Exceptional/ Highly Skilled Pro
•••••	World-Class
••••••	Beyond Normal Human Range

Most folks range between 1 and 3 in their various Attributes and between 0 and 3 in assorted Abilities. So when you're deciding what your mage is especially good at, select a few Traits that represent her most outstanding features, then find the things she's *not* as good at and assign the remaining points accordingly.

Getting Started

A few things to think about before we get started:

- The Awakened come from all walks of life. Assuming that you've got the knowledge to play such characters **(see p. 258)**, your mage could be *anyone*: a Silicon Valley engineer, a housewife from Madrid, a Bejing orphan or a student from Sao Paulo. He might be gay; she might be virginal; ze might be transgender. Your mage could be Sunni Muslim, Roman Catholic, a Wiccan neopagan, or even an atheist. Although most mages Awaken within their first 25 years or so, you could decide to play an elderly dude who's just had a major change of life. Magick knows no age, creed, gender, or ethnicity. You personally might be familiar with a middle-class American or European life, but your character can hail from anywhere.

- Even so, you've got a limited amount of points to spend when you first create your mage. This way, your chronicle follows a group of people who learn and grow, as opposed to a pack of demigods turning their world upside down. Your Storyteller might decide to give you more starting points in order to run a higher-level game. In general, though, you're starting small and working upward from there.

- Your mage is probably a beginner – not *totally* unprepared for her adventures, but new to this whole Awakened deal. Your Storyteller might even begin the chronicle at the Awakening itself, running you through a *prelude* that features your character's introduction to the world of magick. **(See *The Prelude*, p. 262.)** In general, though, the following character creation process assumes that your character has a small amount of experience and training – enough to leave her familiar with the basics but not quite ready to level mountains with her Arts.

- Storytelling games are *collaborative*, not competitive. In this medium, winning involves telling a kick-ass story with your friends. Design and play your mage with an eye toward creative cooperation. Sure, you *can* try to run a moody sociopath who destroys everyone he knows just for giggles. Unless every other player consents to be your butt-monkey, though, that'd probably be a very short, unhappy chronicle.

Working Together

Collaboration provides the key to an enjoyable chronicle. The *characters* might be at each other's throats, but the *players* ought to be having a good time. In that spirit, sit down with your Storyteller and fellow players to hash out a shared foundation for your adventures. Come up with a chronicle concept that has room for everyone. Create a group of characters who have compelling reasons to stick together, and offer them ties to unite them as a whole.

As the Storyteller, give your characters common ground; as the player, decide why that common ground's important to your mage. A group composed of a right-wing Nevada survivalist, an executive from Singapore, a wealthy New York liberal, and an elderly recluse from Tibet might offer up fascinating roleplay opportunities, but it'd be hard to keep that gang together for more than a session or two. So before you whip up a Fallen Man in Black, figure out why your characters should get together, stay together, and risk everything they hold dear in order to face death – and worse – as a team. You could craft the most ingenious hero in the history of roleplaying, but if the game falls apart because there's nothing at its center, then your efforts – and the efforts of everyone else involved – will have been wasted.

In short, work together for mutual enjoyment. Your characters and chronicle will last longer if you do.

Common Traits and Terms

Despite the wide range of options, most **Mage** characters have the following Traits:

A. Name: On your character sheet, list the name by which your character is known when the chronicle begins. That name might change later on, but it's the way he thinks of himself at the start of your game.

B. Player: That'd be you.

C. Chronicle: Many gaming groups give their chronicles a name or title. If your troupe uses a specific title for this chronicle, put that on your character sheet as well.

D. Nature: An archetype that describes your character's true self, *Nature* goes above...

E. Demeanor: ...*Demeanor*, the archetype that reflects how ze presents zeself to other people. This social image could be very close to the mage's inner Nature, but it might also present a *very* different mask to folks who don't know your character well. Information about Natures and Demeanors starts on p. 267.

F. Essence: An Awakened Avatar tends toward one of four different *Essences*. These primal forces guide each mage, shaping magick, behavior, and destiny in subtle yet pervasive ways. **The Essence entries begin on p. 266.**

G. Affiliation: Mages tend to be social creatures. The *Affiliation* Trait reflects your character's overall allegiance (Traditions, Technocracy, Disparate), and the next entry defines her particular group within that affiliation.

H. Sect: This entry deals with a specific group, like the Order of Hermes, Progenitors, Wu Lung, and so forth. You can find the various sects and specific details about them in the previous chapter.

I. Concept: A shorthand description of the overall idea behind your character. Is he a Cranky Recluse? Is she an Ass-Kicking Gutter Punk? Catch the tone of your character in a handful of words and then use that as a foundation for the other Traits. For some potential concepts, see p. 250.

J. Attributes: A character's innate physical, social, and mental Traits go by the collective name of *Attributes*. Those Trait descriptions begin on p. 273.

K. Abilities: The common range of Talents, Skills, and Knowledges that reflect a character's personal and professional capabilities are collectively referred to as *Abilities*. Ability listings begin on p. 275.

L. Spheres: The nine Spheres represent aspects of reality that mages can manipulate. Details about these powers can be found in Chapters Two and Ten.

M. Backgrounds: Mages enjoy a wide range of personal or group-based benefits. The majority of those benefits are open to any Awakened character, although a handful of them are restricted to certain groups. These *Background* Traits entries begin on p. 303.

N. Other Abilities: Beyond the typical Abilities (that is, the ones listed on the character sheet), your mage could have a number of specialized Abilities too. These Traits appear in the ***Other Abilities*** section and can be found from p.289 onward.

O. Arete: The enlightened force of Will that allows Awakened characters to employ magick gets summed up in a Trait called *Arete*. Details begin on p. 328.

P. Willpower: There's a reason mages are often called willworkers; their unusual strength of confidence and conviction gives them high *Willpower* Trait ratings. For more details, see p. 330.

Q. Quintessence/ Paradox: A spectrum of opposing Traits, the ***Quintessence/ Paradox wheel*** shows how in or out of tune your mage's energy is with regards to the rest of reality. When your mage absorbs Quintessence, mark these boxes clockwise from the dot onward; when the character accumulates Paradox, mark them counterclockwise from the dot. This way, the wheel reflects the conflicting forces within your mage. Further information begins on p. 331.

R. Health: When the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (and enemy characters) make their mark upon your mage, you make your own marks upon the *Health* chart. Ranging from Bruised to Incapacitated, this Trait reflects the effects of injury. For details, see **Chapter Nine**, p. 406.

S. Experience: Throughout the course of the chronicle, your mage accumulates experience points that you get to spend on new or increased Traits. Information about *Experience* begins on p. 335.

Mage features space for Merits, Flaws, equipment, and other details. The primary Traits, however, all fit onto the main character sheet page, and the following steps and entries explore them all in detail.

20th Anniversary Edition

MAGE: THE ASCENSION

Name: (A)
Player: (B)
Chronicle: (C)

Nature: (D)
Demeanor: (E)
Essence: (F)

Affiliation: (G)
Sect: (H)
Concept: (I)

(J) Attributes

Physical

Strength ●OOOO
Dexterity ●OOOO
Stamina ●OOOO

Social

Charisma ●OOOO
Manipulation ●OOOO
Appearance ●OOOO

Mental

Perception ●OOOO
Intelligence ●OOOO
Wits ●OOOO

(K) Abilities

Talents

Alertness OOOOO
Art OOOOO
Athletics OOOOO
Awareness OOOOO
Brawl OOOOO
Empathy OOOOO
Expression OOOOO
Intimidation OOOOO
Leadership OOOOO
Streetwise OOOOO
Subterfuge OOOOO

Skills

Crafts OOOOO
Drive OOOOO
Etiquette OOOOO
Firearms OOOOO
Martial Arts OOOOO
Meditation OOOOO
Melee OOOOO
Research OOOOO
Stealth OOOOO
Survival OOOOO
Technology OOOOO

Knowledges

Academics OOOOO
Computer OOOOO
Cosmology OOOOO
Enigmas OOOOO
Esoterica OOOOO
Investigation OOOOO
Law OOOOO
Medicine OOOOO
Occult OOOOO
Politics OOOOO
Science OOOOO

(L) Spheres

Correspondence OOOOO
Entropy OOOOO
Forces OOOOO
Life OOOOO
Matter OOOOO
Mind OOOOO
Prime OOOOO
Spirit OOOOO
Time OOOOO

Advantages

(M) Backgrounds

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

(N) Other Traits

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

(O) Arete

● O O O O O O O O O

(P) Willpower

O O O O O O O O O O
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

(Q) Quintessence

Paradox

(R) Health

Bruised	-0	☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

(S) Experience

Character Creation Process

Step One: Concept and Identity

Decide identity and motivation; choose concept, Affiliation, Essence, and archetypes.

Step Two: Select Attributes

Place initial dot into each Attribute.

Prioritize primary, secondary, and tertiary Attribute categories (Physical, Social, Mental) (7/ 5/ 3).

Rate Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina.

Rate Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance.

Rate Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits.

Step Three: Select Abilities

Prioritize Abilities as above (13/ 9/ 5).

Choose Talents, Skills, Knowledges.

Check Secondary Abilities for specialized Traits.

No Ability may be higher than 3 at this stage.

Step Four: Select Advantages

Choose Backgrounds (7).

Define focus (paradigm, practice, instruments).

Step Five: Finishing Touches

Record Spheres (6, with the Affinity Sphere receiving the first dot).

Record beginning Arete (1), Willpower (5), Quintessence (Avatar rating) and Paradox (0).

Spend freebie points (15).

Describe appearance/ impression, quirks, culture, beliefs, Avatar, motivations, identity.

Sample Concepts

- **Activist** – Journalist, blogger, lobbyist, malcontent.
- **Artist** – Writer, dancer, painter, musician.
- **Athlete** – Team player, personal trainer, physical artisan, thrill-seeker.
- **Caretaker** – Parent, teacher, social worker, medical professional.
- **Criminal** – Gang member, con artist, drug dealer, thief.
- **Executive** – Tycoon, manager, facilitator, power-player.
- **Guardian** – Cop, security guard, conspiracy theorist, social watchdog.
- **Intellectual** – Scholar, professor, philosopher, social critic.
- **Kid** – Child, student, innocent, gutter-punk.
- **Laborer** – Factory worker, sales clerk, roadie, construction worker.
- **Mystic** – Priest/ess, hermit, shaman, enlightened weirdo.
- **Night-Owl** – Bartender, bouncer, club-goer, celebrity.
- **Rebel** – Vagabond, outlaw, urban tribalist, subculture devotee.
- **Technician** – Mechanic, lab tech, craftsman, computer geek.
- **Warrior** – Solider, mercenary, vigilante, prophet.

Essences

- **Dynamic** – Passionate force for progress and change.
- **Static** – Grounded agent of secure stability.
- **Primordial** – Elusive figure of primal mystery.
- **Questing** – Wandering dreamer of new horizons.

Archetypes (Nature & Demeanor)

See pp. 267-273.

- **Activist** – You fix a broken world.
- **Benefactor** – You've got the power to help, and so you do.
- **Contrary** – You invert order to reveal greater truths.
- **Crusader** – You're a front-line fighter for a better tomorrow.
- **Hacker** – You upgrade things by taking them apart.
- **Idealist** – A greater Truth awaits us, and you know what it is.
- **Innovator** – Your imagination drives progress forward.
- **Kid** – Innocent and playful, you inspire others to take care of you.
- **Loner** – You need no one else.
- **Machine** – Weakness is for lesser beings.
- **Mad Scientist** – True science knows no bounds!
- **Martyr** – It's your pleasure to serve.
- **Monster** – You're the unapologetic shadow in the mirror of your world.
- **Prophet** – Speaking truth to power is your life's work.
- **Rogue** – Rebellion is your gospel and your fame.
- **Sensualist** – Sensation is your drug of choice.
- **Survivor** – No matter what happens, you endure.
- **Traditionalist** – As far as you're concerned, the old ways are best.
- **Trickster** – You make the world your toy.
- **Visionary** – You see beyond the obvious and chase a greater vision for us all.

Factions

The *Affinity Sphere* entry under each group gives the default Sphere for this sect. Some groups have more than one Sphere listed, but *only one* Affinity Sphere may be chosen per character.

- **The Traditions** seek a return to the days of High Magick or a new dawn of mystic potential. Bitter enemies of the Technocracy, they appear to have been losing the battle for reality.
- **The Technocracy** enforces global order under their Enlightened guidance and protection. Dedicated to wiping out Reality Deviants, they've spent over 500 years at war with the mystic Traditions.
- **The Disparates** protect their ancestral ways, nurture their chosen people, and disdain this war that has caused untold misery. Often dismissed in the battle for reality, these groups have largely gone underground and now begin to band together for mutual protection.

The Nine Traditions

See (pp. 148-165).

- **Akashayana/Akashic Brotherhood** – Masters of mind, body, and spirit through the Arts of personal discipline.

  Affinity Spheres: Mind or Life
- **Celestial Chorus** – Sacred singers who give a human Voice to the Divine Song.

  Affinity Spheres: Prime, Forces, or Spirit
- **Cult of Ecstasy/ Sahajiya** – Visionary seers who transcend limitations through sacred experience.

  Affinity Spheres: Time, Life, or Mind
- **Dreamspeakers/ Kha'vadi** – Preservers and protectors of both the Spirit Ways and the Earthly cultures that have been looted, abandoned, and oppressed.

  Affinity Spheres: Spirit, Force, Life, or Matter
- **Euthanatoi/Chakravanti** – Disciples of mortality who purge corruption and bring merciful release from suffering.

  Affinity Spheres: Entropy, Life, or Spirit
- **Order of Hermes** – Rigorous masters of High Magick and the Elemental Arts.

  Affinity Spheres: Forces
- **Society of Ether/Sons of Ether** – Graceful saviors of scientific potential.

  Affinity Spheres: Matter, Forces, or Prime
- **Verbena** – Primal devotees of rough Nature and mystic blood.

  Affinity Spheres: Life or Forces
- **Virtual Adepts** – Reality-hackers devoted to rebooting their world.

  Affinity Spheres: Correspondence/ Data or Forces

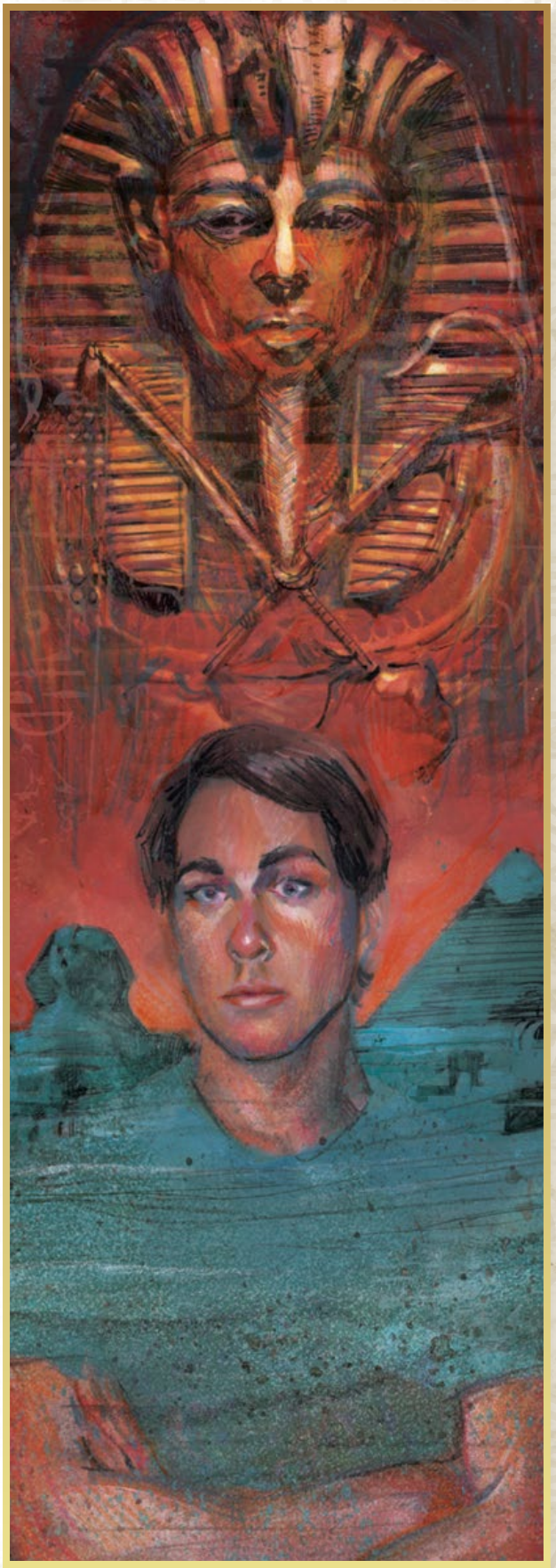
The Technocratic Union

See (pp. 186-195).

- **Iteration X** – Perfectors of the human machine.

  Affinity Spheres: Forces, Matter, or Time
- **New World Order** – Custodians of social order and global stability.

  Affinity Spheres: Mind or Correspondence/ Data



- **Progenitors** – Innovators dedicated to the potential of organic life.

  Affinity Spheres: Life or Prime
- **Syndicate** – Masters of finance, status, and the power of wealth.

  Affinity Spheres: Entropy, Mind, or Primal Utility
- **Void Engineers** – Explorers and protectors of extradimensional space.

  Affinity Spheres: Dimensional Science, Correspondence, or Forces

The Disparate Crafts

See (pp. 202-223).

- **Ahl-i-Batin** – Seers of Unity through Divine connection and subtle influence.

  Affinity Spheres: Correspondence or Mind (*never* Entropy)
- **Bata'a** – Inheritors of voodoo, dedicated to restoring a broken world.

  Affinity Spheres: Life or Spirit
- **Children of Knowledge** – Crowned Ones devoted to alchemical perfection.

  Affinity Sphere: Forces, Matter, Prime, or Entropy
- **Hollow Ones** – Dark romantics laughing in the face of ruin.

  Affinity Sphere: Any
- **Kopa Loei** – Defenders of Nature, the Old Gods, and their culture.

  Affinity Sphere: Any
- **Ngoma** – African High Magi, sworn to restore what's been taken from their home and people.

  Affinity Spheres: Life, Mind, Prime, or Spirit
- **Orphans** – Self-Awakened mages surviving in the shadows of other sects.

  Affinity Sphere: Any
- **Sisters of Hippolyta** – Guardians of the Sacred Feminine.

  Affinity Spheres: Life or Mind
- **Taftâni** – Middle Eastern mystics shaping the gifts of Allah and the Arts of man.

  Affinity Spheres: Forces, Matter, Prime, or Spirit
- **Templar Knights** – Bastions of chivalry in a corrupt age.

  Affinity Spheres: Forces, Life, Mind, or Prime
- **Wu Lung** – Preservers of heavenly wisdom, order, and nobility.

  Affinity Sphere: Spirit, Forces, Matter, or Life

Abilities

Primary Abilities

See (pp. 275-289).

- **Talents:** Alertness, Art, Athletics, Awareness, Brawl, Empathy, Expression, Intimidation, Leadership, Streetwise, Subterfuge
- **Skills:** Crafts, Drive, Etiquette, Firearms, Martial Arts, Meditation, Melee, Research, Stealth, Survival, Technology
- **Knowledges:** Academics, Computer, Cosmology/ Subdimensions, Enigmas, Esoterica, Investigation, Law, Medicine, Occult, Politics, Science

Secondary Abilities

See (pp. 289-300).

- **Talents:** Animal Kinship, Blatancy, Carousing, Do, Flying, High Ritual, Lucid Dreaming, Seduction (*optional:* Hobby)
- **Skills:** Acrobatics, Archery, Biotech, Energy Weapons, Hypertech, Jetpack, Pilot, Riding, Security, Torture (*optional*: Professional)
- **Knowledges:** Area Knowledge, Belief Systems, Cultural Savvy, Cryptography, Demolitions, Finance, Helmsman, Lore/ RD Data, Media, Pharmacopeia/ Poisons (*optional*: Expert)

Backgrounds

See (pp. 301-328).

- **Allies** – Friends who'll help you out.
- **Alternate Identity** – An established alias.
- **Arcane/ Cloaking** – Mysterious ability to remain unrecognized.
- **Avatar/ Genius** – Embodiment of the Awakened/ Enlightened Self.
- **Backup** – Agents you can call upon in emergencies.
- **Certification** – Special permits for special things.
- **Chantry/ Construct** – Mystic or Technocratic stronghold.
- **Contacts** – Information sources and social networks.
- **Cult** – Group of dedicated believers.
- **Demesne** – Personal inner dream-space.
- **Destiny** – Inspiring sense of great purpose.
- **Dream/ Hypercram** – Ability to tap into Abilities you don't normally possess.
- **Enhancement** $ – Cybernetic or biotech improvements to your body.
- **Fame** – Notoriety in the Sleeper world.

- **Familiar/ Companion** – Non-human helper with special abilities.
- **Influence** – Social clout in the mortal world.
- **Legend** – A potent archetype connected to you.
- **Library** – Access to special information.
- **Mentor** – Awakened/ Enlightened elder with a bond to you.
- **Node** – A place of power that's more or less in your possession.
- **Past Lives** – Helpful memories from prior incarnations.
- **Patron** – Influential benefactor with helpful resources.
- **Rank** – A title of importance among the Masses.
- **Requisitions** * – Access to Technocratic hardware.
- **Resources** – Financial credit, cash flow, and property.
- **Retainers** – Skilled followers.
- **Sanctum/ Laboratory** $ – Special place to work your arts.
- **Secret Weapons** * – Guinea-pig status with Technocratic inventors.
- **Spies** – Information networks.
- **Totem** $ – A powerful spirit ally. (*Shamanic characters only.*)
- **Wonder** – A Talisman, Fetish, or Device that contains its own reality-bending power.

**Available only to Technocratic Union characters.*

$ Costs double the usual amount of points.

Spheres

See (pp. 512-527).

- **Correspondence** – Understanding of the connections between places, spaces, and things.
- **Entropy** – Study of mortality, probability, and chaos.
- **Forces** – Command over elemental energies.
- **Life** – Influence over organic beings and the physical structures of living bodies.
- **Matter** – Control of inert materials, objects, and solid elemental structures.
- **Mind** – Influence over emotions and thoughts, including the ability to project consciousness from one's physical body.
- **Prime** – Control over primordial energies.
- **Spirit** – Contact with Otherworldly spaces and entities; considered an Art by mystics and a Science by Technocrats, though in game terms it's all the same thing.
- **Time** – Perception of, and influence over, temporal states and time-based phenomena.

Technocratic Spheres (optional rules)

- **Data** – Tracing connections through information.
- **Dimensional Science** – Hyperphysics of alternate dimensions.
- **Primal Utility** – Employment of quantum valuation energies.

Freebie Points

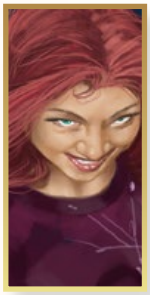
Trait	Cost
Attribute	5 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Background	1 per dot
Sphere	7 per dot
Arete	4 per dot (Max. Total: 3)
Willpower	1 per dot
Quintessence	1 per four dots
Merit	cost as per Merit
Flaw	bonus as per Flaw (Max. Total: 7)

Experience Costs

Trait	Cost
New Ability	3
New Sphere	10
Affinity Sphere	current rating x 7
Other Sphere	current rating x 8
Arete	current rating x 8
Attribute	current rating x 4
Ability	3
Background*	current rating x 3
Willpower	current rating x 1

** Storyteller's option; Backgrounds might not be raised by experience points. Also, Backgrounds that cost double the usual amount cost current rating x 6.*

Part I: Creating Your Character



The many elements of a **Mage** character boil down to five simple steps, outlined on this ***Character Creation Chart***:

Step One: Concept and Identity

Start off your character with a single question: *Who are you?* A cybernetic hardass? A desperate runaway? A corporate shark? This brainstormed image gives you a basic foundation for that character's identity.

Follow that up with another question: *Is that who you were when you first Awakened, or has Awakening made you the person you are today?* Awakening, after all, is a life-changing event. After it, no matter how much she tries, a mage is never quite the same person again. By asking yourself whether your mage had that essential identity *before* the Awakening or if she acquired that identity *as a result* of Awakening, you can trace the effects of Awakening on the character you create. **(This is especially true if your Storyteller runs a prelude adventure; again, see p. 262.)**

And finally, ask one of the simplest, most important questions of all: *What do you want?* This last inquiry supplies *motivation*, the driving force of any intriguing character. Once you figure out what your mage wants out of life, the universe, and everything, you've got a handle on what she'll do in order to get it.

Concept

Your answers to those questions provide the *concept*, a guide and key for every other element of that character. This concept also reveals the human side of your mage; our corporate shark, after all, might be a Syndicate Manager, a Ngoma officiator, a Hermetic wizard, or an Etherite visionary. At heart, though, he's a creature of the corporate realm, with magicks, skills, and alliances that make him better at his job. A handful of potential concepts can be found on the ***Character Creation Process chart***, though you can feel free to make up your own concepts too.

Once you've figured out your basic concept, use that as a sort of blueprint to guide the mage's eventual development. No one, no matter how uncomplicated she might appear to be, is a static, unchanging stereotype. Sure, our corporate raider might look like a typical Wall Street asshole; he might even start off his career as the sort of one-percenter scum you'd like to see dragged behind a team of mules and then shot. Maybe he even thought of himself in those terms, gazing in the mirror of his richly-appointed bathroom every morning on his way to work. What if, however, that Wall Street predator has a change of heart? What if he Awakens to a greater reality? What if he never really *was* what he appears, on the surface, to be? Maybe he's pretending to be a simple-minded corporate monster while actually pursing a totally different agenda... or perhaps he *is* a corporate monster, a monster whose Enlightened Path includes dealing in the fine Art of Desire.

Now we're moving on from a simple concept to a complex character.

Affiliation

Most mages have some *affiliation*: a faction to which they belong. In player terms, you can choose from among the Traditions – mages belonging to the Council of Nine Mystic Traditions; the Technocracy – agents of the Technocratic Union; or the Disparates who refuse to join either of the other supposedly important factions. Marauders are too chaotic and bizarre to fit in with groups of other willworkers, whereas the Nephandi remain dedicated to bringing the other groups down. Thus, neither option works well for player characters in an ongoing **Mage** chronicle. (A Storyteller *might* allow a player to create a Marauder or Nephandus. We don't recommend that, though, as such characters invite serious headaches into your game.)

Affiliation gives your characters common ground and a basic reason to cooperate. Although mystics from the Traditions and Disparate sects might cooperate with each other, the Technocracy has little tolerance for Reality Deviants. A chronicle based on the adventures of a Dreamspeaker spirit-walker, an imperious wizard from the Wu Lung, a dedicated Templar, and a Void Engineer space marine might sound like fun, but it'd probably turn into a *Reservoir Dogs*-style kill zone before the first story ends. When you're crafting characters for your group, choose character affiliations that allow your mages to share a room without offing one another on general principle. (See ***Working Together*, p. 247.)**

Once you've decided your character's affiliation, decide which *sect* he calls his own. A Tradition mage might belong to the Order of Hermes, the Virtual Adepts, or some other related sect; a Technocrat could hail from Iteration X or the New World Order; a Disparate mage could join the Ngoma, hang with the Hollow Ones, or shape his own destiny among the unaligned Orphans. The choice will reflect your mage's Arts, goals, and company. Although he might change it in the future, that sect is a vital element of the character's identity at the beginning of the chronicle.

Essence

Even more vital to your mage's core identity is his Avatar's *Essence*: the inner drive that shapes his approach to life and magick. This mystic inner self provides you with a rough script for your mage's overall personality. A Dynamic mage, for instance, would pursue her goals with intense passion, whereas a Pattern-oriented one would strive for stability and permanence.

By the way, it's worth remembering that every **Mage** character should have at least one dot in the Avatar Background. Strong Avatars (that is, ones with more dots in that Trait) will express a more potent sense of Essence through the mage. A character with only one dot in his Avatar will feel occasional stirrings of his Dynamic Essence, for example, and one with Avatar 5 would be so Dynamic that he'd rarely sit still for more than a few minutes at a time.

Archetypes: Nature and Demeanor

Based on those tendencies, each character has *personality archetypes*: a *Nature* and *Demeanor* that represent the ways she interacts with her world. Nature reflects the character's inner self, whereas Demeanor represents the way she presents herself to other folks. Depending on the character, these two Traits could be pretty similar or wildly divergent. Our corporate shark, for example, might present himself as a Crusader who's building a better world; under that Demeanor, though, he's actually a Trickster who delights in upending the expectations of his officemates.

A mage's Nature usually depends a lot upon his Essence. That tendency influences what the character truly wants and values. Throughout the chronicle, you'll refresh your character's Willpower Trait by doing things that reinforce his Nature and gratify the needs of his inner self.

The Demeanor, on the other hand, can be a total façade. It *could* be an honest reflection of the mage's inner landscape, but it probably isn't. Even the most integrated people protect their true selves from public view. Especially in the treacherous world of the Awakened, folks who reveal their intimate truths – in effect, giving the world a true name to use against them – are pretty rare.

Taken together, these related elements tell you a lot about who your character is, what she needs, how she conducts herself, and who her friends and enemies might be. A corporate shark going by the name of Malcolm Jamal Leonard could be a Ngoma Trickster who's using his executive position and his Crusader Demeanor to infiltrate and undermine large corporations in pursuit of a bottom line that no one understands except him. His Questing Essence inspires him to build a better world... after he's finished knocking down the masters of the current one and enriching himself and his allies in the process!

Once you know who your character is, then go on to figure out what she can do.

Step Two: Attributes

Attributes reflect your character's innate physical, social, and mental capabilities. Ranging from one to five dots, these Traits provide the basis for the dice pools you use in order to get things done. The Physical category features *Strength*, *Dexterity*, and *Stamina*. *Charisma*, *Manipulation*, and *Appearance* make up the Social category; *Perception*, *Intelligence*, and *Wits* comprise the Mental Traits category. As mentioned earlier, each dot in one of these Traits represents one die you roll when attempting a task. The more dots you have, the better you are with the Attribute in question.

All Attributes start off with a base rating of 1. You get points to spend when raising them up from there during character creation. When you *do* spend those points, however, you need to prioritize the importance of your Physical, Social, and Mental Attributes. In your *primary* category, you get seven points to spend; in your *secondary* field, you get five; the lowest priority, the *tertiary* group, gets a mere three points, which obviously don't go far. You can use *freebie points* (see below) to raise those initial ratings, but doing so is pretty expensive, so choose your attributes with the idea that your character will be stuck with them for a little while once the chronicle begins.

All of your chosen Traits must be rooted in your character concept and history. For example, our Wall Street Trickster might work out at the gym, but his real strengths are based in the Social and Mental categories.

Let's say that Malcolm *does* work out regularly; his Strength rating (3) is pretty decent, with average Stamina (2) and a fairly poor Dexterity (1). His secondary Mental Traits are higher overall than his tertiary Physical ones; a Wits rating of 3 puts him ahead of most of his peers, and an Intelligence of 3 makes him smarter than the average person.

It's the Social Traits, though, that make Malcolm a formidable presence. His seven primary Attribute points become Manipulation 4, Charisma 4, and Appearance 2. Malcolm's a decent-looking dude, if somewhat clumsy, but he could sell dirt to a farmer and leave that guy thinking he'd gotten the better end of the deal.

The concept, then, shapes your point-spending priorities, and the Trait numbers give you some insights into the way your character comes across.

Step Three: Abilities

In the same vein, the Ability Traits represent your character's *Talents* (innate aptitudes, honed by exercise), *Skills* (abilities gained from training and practice), and *Knowledges* (intellectual pursuits backed up with experience). Like Attributes, these Traits have points allocated into primary, secondary, and tertiary groups. Your primary Abilities get an initial 13 points, with nine points given out for secondary Abilities and five points left over for tertiary Abilities. Freebie points can raise the initial ratings... which is a good thing, considering how fast those points can go out the door. Unlike attributes, Abilities start with a base rating of zero.

When placing those initial points, there's another limitation: You can't place more than three dots into a single Ability. Later, during Step Five, you might drop a few freebie points into a three-dot Ability in order to raise its rating by another dot or two. To start with, though, you can give your character ratings between 1 and 3 in the various Abilities. Considering just how many Abilities there are in **Mage 20**, it's a good idea to identify your priorities ahead of time.

Secondary Abilities

Mage 20 features a vast range of Abilities – the core Abilities most characters encounter, and three groups of secondary Abilities that reflect specialized expertise. Some of these Traits demand certain concepts – the average elementary-school student, for example, won't know how to fly.

As with Attributes, the Abilities you choose will depend a lot on your character concept. Let's go back to our Wall Street Trickster. Sure, Malcolm knows a lot about Finance, Subterfuge, Law, and probably Computers. He's not likely to use Energy Weapons, though, and his Firearms Skill would depend upon

whether or not he's spent time at a shooting range. He works out, so he might have several dots in Athletics. Is he Streetwise, though? Maybe so, but probably not. Malcolm's life story will tell you about the Abilities he has at the start of the game, and the chronicle reveals which ones he gains in the course of his adventures.

Step Four: Advantages

Beyond the things we *are* and the things we *learn*, there are the things we *acquire* by way of money, social connections, and sheer luck. In game terms, these Traits are called *Advantages*: things that set your character apart from other people.

Again, **Mage 20** offers a huge selection of Advantages; no one can have them all, and certain characters can't get certain Advantages, period. Thankfully, you've got seven points to spend on *Background* Traits, and your mage's magickal *focus* doesn't cost points at all. Like Abilities, these characteristics depend on your concept and backstory. Although an executive, a housewife, and a homeless girl will have very different resources, no **Mage** character is without *some* sort of Advantage.

Backgrounds

Money? Connections? An Avatar strong enough to blow the doors off your mind? Welcome to the wonderful world of Background traits. Once you've taken care of your character's Attributes and Abilities, it's time to figure out the sorts of things she can draw upon when need be. Malcolm, for instance, obviously has Contacts, Influence, and Resources; a gutter-kid could have nothing but a dazzlingly potent Avatar and a mystic Treasure she snatched when no one was looking. You can augment the initial seven Background points with freebie points during Step Five. Background Traits are *cheap*, and certain characters can have lots of them if their concepts allow for such luxuries.

Focus: Paradigm, Practice, and Instruments

As revealed in **Chapters One**, **Two,** and **Ten**, magick is an extension of the mage. Belief guides the Arts that shape reality. Thus, your character's *focus* is an essential part of who she is and what she can do.

In previous editions of **Mage**, the term "focus" referred to the various tools a mage used in order to cast magickal Effects or Procedures. In **Mage 20**, *focus* becomes a collective term for a character's belief, or *paradigm*; his associated *practice*; and the *instruments* that go with both. A Hermetic wizard's focus, therefore, would be the High Ritual Magick practice and a number of beliefs and tools associated with that practice.

Focus also provides one of the defining differences between a mystic mage and a Technocrat: A mystic might eventually learn to transcend his focus, but a member of the Technocracy is indoctrinated so firmly into her focus that *she cannot leave it behind* without a major change of beliefs. Technomancers aligned with mystic groups – the Virtual Adepts, Society of Ether, and other science-based willworkers whose worldviews are somewhat flexible – might grow beyond their tech-based focuses in time, but it takes significant effort in order for them to do so. Tech-based reality favors tech-based Arts, but only the most Enlightened tech-based mages can escape the focus of their views. (For details, see ***Character Progress*** at the end of this chapter.)

A new **Mage** character needs a focus comprised of at least *one paradigm, one magickal practice, and no fewer than seven associated instruments*. (Seven's a mystically significant number.) You can combine existing paradigms and practices into new ones, or add new instruments, if the Storyteller agrees and if that hybrid practice and its tools fit your character concept. In time, your mage's Arete rating can rise high enough to put those tools aside. In the beginning, though, a focus for his magick – however he defines that magick – is absolutely required.

What sort of focus could you employ? For an example, let's use Malcolm Jamal Leonard, our Wall Street Trickster. Combining the ancient High Ritual Magick of his ancestors with a high-tech version of the Art of Desire, Malcolm focuses his intentions through a mix of both. His tools include complex diagrams based in sacred mathematics, crafted to look like spreadsheets; prepared amulets he gives as gifts to business partners; carefully chosen words; the purification baths he enacts each morning; prayers he offers to the higher powers; the rituals he conducts behind closed doors; the specially tailored suits he wears; and the commanding presence he brings to everything he says and does. Even Malcolm's gym routines include self-perfection exercises that no one, except perhaps another mage, would recognize as magickal acts. Through these tools and practices, he focuses his intentions and brings magick into his world.

For detailed listings of paradigms, practices, and instruments, see ***Focus and the Arts*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 565-600).

Step Five: Finishing Touches

A mage must have magick, and so the final step of character creation deals with the Traits that define his magickal capacity.

Optional Traits: Resonance, Merits, and Flaws

Mage Revised introduced the *Resonance* Trait, a reflection of the metaphysical feedback that surrounds Awakened characters. Because this Trait had not been featured in earlier **Mage** editions, it's considered an *optional rule*. For details, see **(pp. 333, 560-561)**.

A collection of specialized Traits, *Merits* and *Flaws* confer benefits and liabilities beyond the usual character creation process. For a selection of Merits and Flaws, see **Appendix II**, **(pp. 642-648)**.

Spheres

The nine elements of reality provide the keys to magick. During character creation, your mage gets six dots to place in the Spheres of your choice... with a few provisions, of course.

All mages begin with one *Affinity Sphere*: the Sphere that character understands best. Generally, this Sphere is associated with a mage's first experience with magick: a person who Awakened by suddenly commanding a thunderstorm would have an affinity for Forces, whereas one who was Enlightened when she tried to bring her squashed dog back to life would feel an affinity for Life. The first Sphere dot you place is your Affinity Sphere.

Your character must have at least one dot in one of her group's Affinity Spheres. You can choose any allowed Spheres for your mage, *so long as you place at least one dot under your group's Affinity Sphere as well.* A Verbena character, for instance, must take Life or Forces as at least one of those initial six dots, whereas a Chakravanti mage needs at least one dot in Entropy, Life, or Spirit. Malcolm, being a member of the Ngoma, can have potential affinity Spheres of Life, Mind, Prime, or Spirit. Given Malcolm's concept, the player prefers Mind and takes that Sphere as Malcolm's affinity.

The other provision is this: Your beginning Sphere ranks cannot be higher than your character's Arete rating. A mage with an Arete of 2, say, can't have Life 3. You'll probably want to hold back on assigning those Sphere dots until after you decide on your next Trait.

Arete

One cannot work magick without *Arete*, the excellence reflecting your character's Enlightened Will and understanding. Non-mages do not have Arete at all – the Trait reflects an Awakened state of being. In game terms, you'll roll this Trait when casting magickal Effects. A beginning mage gets one free dot in Arete. Additional dots must be purchased with freebie points. Note that additional dots are rather expensive, so a high Arete Trait limits your other options. During character creation, you're limited to a maximum Arete of 3. As mentioned earlier, a chronicle usually begins, by default, with inexperienced mages who grow throughout the course of the tale.

Let's say that our friend Malcolm has an Arete rating of 3; most of his freebie points went into getting that rating, but it makes him a pretty effective mage. Mental influence is his primary approach to magick, so his player places that first dot into Mind and then adds two more into that Sphere, giving Malcolm an impressive Sphere rank of Mind 3. As the player puts the other three dots into Life 2 and Entropy 1, our Wall Street Trickster gets the ability to read people, minds, and probability with devastating clarity... and to bend people to his will before they even realize what's going on.

For details about Arete, see pp. 328-329.

Willpower

Magick demands Will, and so this *Willpower* Trait represents your character's determination, confidence, and drive. A starting mage begins with a Willpower rating of 5, and you can add more dots with freebie points. As always, this Trait rating depends upon the character concept; it's a good bet that Malcolm has a Willpower of 6 or perhaps even 7, but the gutter-kid we mentioned earlier would have a Willpower of 5 – unusually stubborn by most standards, but unfocused when compared to the disciplined executive.

For details about Willpower, see pp. 330-331.

Quintessence and Paradox

The raw essence of Creation, Quintessence flows through a mage's Avatar. Paradox, on the other hand, contradicts your mage's place in the universe. The ***Quintessence*** and ***Paradox*** Traits oppose one another across a wheel. The first grants your character a mystic edge, whereas the other places your mage in jeopardy. The interplay between these related Traits is explained further under the entries for Quintessence and Paradox **(pp. 331-333)**. For now, give your mage a Quintessence rating equal to his Avatar Background Trait (Avatar 4 equals four Quintessence, for example), with no Paradox points. Don't worry – you'll have plenty of time to earn some soon enough!

Freebie Points

Finally, there are *freebie points* – that handful of points that allows you to raise or purchase other Traits. A beginning character gets 15 of these points to spend, although taking Flaw Traits (see sidebar) might give you a few more points to work with. Malcolm's player, as we'd mentioned, put most of his points into Arete. Where you choose to put them is your own call.

Some Traits cost more freebie points than others. The ***Character Creation chart*** has an entry for the various traits and their associated freebie point expenditures. Again, Arete cannot be bought higher than 3, and Spheres cannot be raised above the Arete rating.

Spark of Life

With a few more flourishes, your character's ready to begin the tale. Filling out the concept with several non-Trait details, you'll turn that character sheet into an engaging alter-ego with her own stories to tell.

Appearance and Impression

When your mage walks into a room, what is it that people see? First impressions are important, so decide what kind of impression your character makes. This sort of thing goes beyond mere looks, although a person's appearance is usually the first thing folks notice; such impressions, however, extend to the other senses too. Does he smell like Axe? Does she have a smoker's cough? How does your character move? Dress? Act? If he's attractive (as in the Appearance Trait), *how* is he attractive? Lean build? Tight abs? Deep eyes? A killer grin? Is she rich, poor, rich trying to *look* poor? Those choices come across in the way she dresses – in whether she wears the clothes or whether the clothes wear *her*. Be as specific as you want, maybe down to the type of T-shirt he's got on or the brand of jacket she slings over her shoulder. In short, decide the overall impression your

mage projects in person, and have fun with the little details. A memorable character makes vivid impressions on her world.

Quirks

Part of that impression involves *quirks*: the little (or not-so-little) eccentricities that mark your character's personality. Maybe he massages the back of his neck when he's feeling nervous; perhaps she sings Journey songs when she thinks no one's listening. Quirks not only humanize our budding demigods but also offer potentially amusing (or potentially tragic) plot hooks for later events. Maybe your witch's talking cat starts singing Journey songs when your mage is trying to seem cool, or maybe the neck-massaging hitman reveals his nervous tic at a tense moment during negotiations. Everybody, even those folks who seem utterly cool, reveals a quirk or two once you get to know them. By creating a few idiosyncrasies for your character, you provide a bit of color for that impressive bunch of Traits.

Culture

A fundamental element of a person's identity, *culture* provides a catch-all way of taking into account things like ethnicity, gender, religion, social class, national heritage, chosen lifestyle, political affiliations, and so forth. So when you're laying out your character's background, ask yourself where he comes from, how he views himself, what he does for fun or money, and what sort of company he keeps – and why. Is he a middle-class Asian-American Goth? A working-class farm kid from rural Canada? Does she love anime... and if so, what kinds? Is your mage intergendered, transgendered, asexual – and how has that identity affected that person's life? As individual as we might strive to be, we are the products of our cultures – both the cultures we grow up with and the cultures we choose. Our political affiliations, religious beliefs, sexual relationships, and social interactions all shape our identities. So how have those elements shaped your mage?

Roleplaying the Other

A Storytelling game allows you the opportunity to be someone you're not. And for some folks, that opportunity includes the chance to play a person of a different culture, age, gender, ethnicity, creed, or social class. If and when you take on such a role, though, please treat it with respect. Especially when it comes to portraying folks from a marginalized group, it's easy to slide into insulting stereotypes even when you're trying not to do so. To avoid such pitfalls, base your role and play on humanity, not stereotypes.

On a deeper level, use your role as an opportunity to examine the assumptions, privilege, and prejudices of your own cultural reality by flipping that perception around and looking at it from another side. If you're a guy playing a woman, consider what it's like to actually *be* a woman. Are you white? Then consider the ways in which society treats people whose default descriptor is "they're black." Taken seriously, a culturally different role can open your eyes to sides of life you didn't recognize before. And although that might not change the reality of your experience, it might adjust the way you look at other folks who aren't like you.

(For some hilarious examples of how *not* to play the Other, check out the movie *Gamers: Dorkness Rising*, in which both the gender-bent chaos mage and the screaming monk make this point better than we ever could.)

Gender Identity

Although gender identity and sexual orientation have never been as clearly defined as cultural conservatives like to believe, the 21st century has seen an unprecedented awareness of sexual and gender possibilities. And even though this freaks the living hell out of certain people, there's more freedom these days to express and explore potentials beyond just male and female heterosexual polarities.

Mages have always bent preconceptions around their little fingers. Throughout time and culture, cross-dressing, gender inversion, and intersexuality have been regarded as magical tools or dispositions, ways of transcending the expected order. Some cultures referred to gay or transgendered mystics as *two-souls*, *rebises*, *androgynes*, or *hermaphrodites*, after Hermaphroditos, the double-sexed son of Eros and Psyche. Other cultures recognized the blending and crossing of genders as an expression of mystic power, a link to gods like Odin or Dionysus, whose genders were just masks to shed when necessary. People being people, of course, such associations were often unfavorable. The codes of Leviticus, which remain with us even now, are thought by some authorities to have been condemnations of non-Jewish – and thus, to the Hebrews, unholy – practices and creeds.

Over the last few decades, a combination of civil rights activism and human rights awareness has chipped away at the old ways. A gay or trans person in the new millennium can be more open now than he/ she/ ze/ they could have been in previous decades. And between the old associations of mystic power and the new freedom to transcend gender roles without getting burnt at the stake for it, the idea of gender identity is more fluid – and more magickal – than ever before. Especially in queer, polyamorous, transhumanist, neotribal, and psychedelic cultures, it's often more unusual to be conventionally "straight" than it is to hold, embrace, and enjoy the hell out of an identity outside the traditional polarities.

The point? You don't have to limit yourself to rigid male or female polarities, either in **Mage** or in real life. Be who you want to be. There's magick enough for everyone.

Belief, Focus, and Paradigm

Mages are not passive about their beliefs; instead, they believe so strongly in their convictions that those beliefs reshape reality. In a way, the Ascension War is a religious war – not so much a fight between creeds as a showdown between belief systems. Therefore, your character's beliefs are vital parts of *who she is*. So what, then, *does* she believe? In one God? Many gods? Which gods? Or perhaps no god beyond the supremacy of science? Check the ***Common Mage Paradigms*** section in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 568-572) and decide whether one of them, a mix of them, or none of them applies to your character's beliefs.

Once you know what your character believes in, you'll have some idea about his take on magick. Your mage's affiliation and concept can also point you in the right direction – after all, the Society of Ether attracts weird scientists, not Siberian shamans. Those clues sketch out the mage's magickal practice and suggest the tools he uses to focus it.

Those tools, too, will depend on your mage's concept. A mad scientist would use formulas, gadgets, and labs full of cool gear; an urban-artist witch would call the corners, employ herbs, and shape her spells through art. Those tools, in turn, suggest the Abilities your character uses to employ them. She uses blaster-rifles? That'll emphasize her Energy Weapons Skill. Does he perform ritual dances? Then that'll emphasize the Art Talent instead.

Malcolm Leonard uses secret rituals, complex designs, and personal charm to set his magick in motion. Which tools, then, does *your* mage use to get things done, and why does she believe they'll work for her? The ***Common Paradigms, Practices, and Instruments chart*** (Chapter Ten, p. 566), features an array of choices, and each practice described in that chapter has associated paradigms, Abilities, and tools. Select the ones that fit your character best.

Personal Possessions

On a related note, it's a good idea to figure out what your character carries around, keeps close at hand, or has waiting for her back at home. Few people, for example, go everywhere wearing backpacks full of goodies. Your mage's income, social class, pastimes, and so forth will determine the sorts of stuff he has at his disposal. A rich businessman, a poor college student, an urban skate-rat, and a neighborhood priest will have very different homes, clothes, and possessions.

For the most part, you can assume that your mage carries the usual stuff for a person of his or her social class – a wallet, a cell phone, some ID, typical clothes, maybe a laptop, that sort of thing. If and when your mage needs ritual- or tech-gear, figure out what it is and where he keeps it; cauldrons, wands, and plasma rifles aren't exactly the sorts of things people walk down the street with these days. And although focus-instruments don't cost character points, you *do* need special Background Traits in order to own enchanted or hypertech magickal gear. Depending on the nature of that gear, it could be easily hidden (an amulet, a debit card) or impossible to hide in the modern world (a rune-encrusted sword singing "*Blood and souls for Arioch!*"). That distinction makes a *huge* difference in terms of access and portability.

Avatar/ Genius

Then there's the Awakened Self: your mage's Avatar (or Genius). How powerful is it? How does it appear to him, and what does he believe it is? A low-level Avatar Background of 1 or 2 reflects a compelling nudge or intuition. Higher-level ones at Avatar 5, however, take stronger and more obvious forms, topping out with spirits so real they seem like separate entities. Especially if you've got a high Avatar Background, it's important to decide the form and inclinations of that Enlightened Self and to decide how the character wraps his head around its existence. Depending on his concept, affiliations, and beliefs, your mage's Avatar could be anything from a nagging hunch to a full-blown imaginary friend leading him toward challenge and disaster.

Motivations

As we suggested earlier, decide upon your character's motivations. Brainstorm up both short- and long-term goals. Now that she's got magick in her life, what does your mage *want* out of life? A partner? A dog? World peace? A sandwich? No one pursues just one single-minded goal, so keep your mage interesting by constantly exploring her motivations, the tactics she uses in order to achieve them, and the obstacles that stand in her way.

Mundane Identity

Mages have to balance incredible powers with day-to-day humanity. They've got friends, families, lives, lovers, jobs, homes, hopes, ambitions, aspirations, maybe kids, and perhaps lifetimes' worth of goodies or trauma they have yet to set aside. Especially if the Otherworlds are too remote and dangerous to live in, the average mage is still trying to live in the mundane world. What elements of that world, then, are important to your character? And which elements is he trying to put aside so he can get on with his new life?

The character's mundane life becomes especially important if you're running a mage who's just recently Awakened. In that case, she's still sifting through the remnants of the person she was in order to find the person she's going to be from now on. There are bills to pay, pets to clean up after, friends asking, "So what's going *on* with you these days?" If your character has a job, then what does she do and how does she handle it now that magick is a force in her life? The conflicts between that mundane life and the effects of the Awakening (not to mention those pesky HIT Marks smashing through your wall when Mom comes by to visit...) have all kinds of dramatic potential. The more you know about your character's secret identity, the more fun you and your Storyteller can have with its complications.

Obviously, these finishing touches invite various questions and demand creative answers. In the ***Prelude*** section below, you'll find a variety of questions that can help you find this spark of life. And by fleshing out your character this way, you'll turn a bunch of stats into a person worth roleplaying for years to come.

Sample Character Creation

So, remember that street-kid we'd mentioned earlier? That's Camille's concept for a character named Jinx. Kicked out of her home at age 16 for getting caught with both her girlfriend *and* her boyfriend in her mother's bed, Jinx wound up sleeping under bridges in Seattle. Now swept up into gutter-mage intrigues, she's the character Camille wants to run in James's new **Mage** chronicle.

Step One

Jinx isn't a join-the-club type of girl. Camille decides on the concept *Wiseass Street Kid* with no affiliated sect when the tale begins, tagging Jinx as an Orphan mage. James runs a prelude session for her, in which the character Awakens after almost being run over by a car. That car hits a pothole at the last moment, swerving away from the girl and into a lamppost. Camille decides that Entropy makes a good Affinity Sphere, and the girl formerly known as Nina Harris takes on the street name Jinx.

Camille decides that Jinx is a restless risk-taker often driven to excess. That sounds like a *Dynamic* Essence, so Camille selects that Trait for her character. As archetypes, she chooses *Rebel* for Demeanor ("*I take shit from no one!*") and *Seeker* for Nature (under her wiseass façade, Jinx is searching for something she has yet to be able to explain). Up until this point, she's been an easily distracted kid; underneath her apparent ADD, however, there's a pilgrim looking for a cause to believe in.

Step Two

Jinx is cute, tough, and not *stupid*, exactly, but not overly blessed in the brains department either. Camille chooses Social as Jinx's primary Attribute category, Physical as the secondary, and Mental as the tertiary. Dividing up the dots, Camille puts three into Charisma, two into Manipulation, and two into Appearance. With Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, and Appearance 3, the kid stands out in a crowd and knows how to wrap folks into knots if need be. Camille decides that this is both a product of her home-life (Mom's a manipulative, self-involved alcoholic) and a major source of her problems: folks always want more from Jinx than she feels like giving them.

Camille then assigns two of her five Physical category dots into Stamina, two more into Dexterity, and the final one into Strength. Stronger than folks expect her to be, Jinx is more agile and tenacious than most people her age. As for the Mental Traits, Camille drops one dot each into Perception, Intelligence, and Wits. Jinx will refine those Traits on the streets, but for the moment she's no more aware or intelligent than the average person is.

Step Three

A lower-middle-class, suburban, American kid, Nina Harris didn't have a lot of chances to learn exotic skills. Camille figures that her primary Ability will be *Talents*, with *Knowledges* as her secondary category and *Skills* as her tertiary one.

Given Jinx's Dynamic nature and the really high Avatar Camille plans to give her, it stands to reason that the new mage is uncannily perceptive when it comes to things that folks don't often notice. Camille puts two dots into *Alertness*, two into *Awareness*, and – because Jinx can be scarily intense – two into *Intimidation*. Like we said, she's tough, so Camille gives her two dots in *Brawl* as well – Nina's been beating up boys since she was little. Given her physical nature, it makes sense that Jinx gets a dot in *Athletics* as well. After getting kicked out, Jinx has become a bit *Streetwise*; one dot, then, into that Trait. This leaves three dots left. Camille goes to the ***Secondary Talents*** section and finds two that seem to fit Jinx: *Carousing*, because she's a party girl, and *Seduction*, which explains a lot about that girlfriend/ boyfriend thing on Mom's bed. Camille drops two dots into the first, one into the second, and then moves on to Knowledges.

A child of her era, Jinx has fresh schooling and knows her way around a computer. Camille puts two of her nine Knowledges dots into *Academics* and two more into *Computer*. Camille figures that Jinx has an interest in *Esoterica* and the *Occult*; four more dots, then – two into each Knowledge. Given Jinx's streets-and-parties experiences, Camille puts the final dot into *Pharmacopeia*; she's not an expert on drugs, but she's seen, read, heard, and experienced enough about them to understand the basics.

Five dots left for Skill Traits. Camille puts one in *Drive* (she was learning), one into *Etiquette* (she's good at making friends when she wants to), one into *Melee* (you learn fast on the streets), and another into *Stealth* (another healthy skill when you live on the streets). Glancing at the Secondary Skills, Camille places that last dot into *Acrobatics:* Nina took gymnastics when she was younger, and she still remembers a few of the old techniques.

A few of those Traits could definitely be higher. Camille makes a mental note to save some freebie points for Abilities, and then moves on to...

Step Four

From the outset, Camille had planned to give Jinx a powerful *Avatar*. Five out of seven Background dots go into Avatar, reflecting a powerfully Awakened spirit. She spends the other two dots on *Allies* – specifically, on Khan and Synder, two of Jinx's badass friends. These two folks watch Jinx's back and have been teaching her helpful skills that'll help her survive in the Seattle underground. Both are Orphan mages as well, and their friendship will help Camille justify new experience-purchased Traits for Jinx.

Camille decides that the potent Avatar takes the form of a burning fallen angel named Talon. Seductively female, with red-black skin and feathers, Talon encourages Jinx to take chances in the name of Risk. As Talon tells it, Risk is an urban goddess who favors people who take wild dares and live to tell about it. Khan and Synder both spin fire, and they talk about Risk

as if she was a modern goddess too. Jinx figures that between them, they know what they're talking about. Therefore, Jinx considers herself a devotee of Risk, an aspect of the Roman goddess Fortuna, the Lady of Luck and Fate.

So is Jinx Pagan? She's not really sure. As a kid, she'd spent the occasional Sunday in her late father's Catholic Church. That didn't make much impression on her then, and after he died in a car accident it made even less. Since that time, Jinx has dabbled around the edges of the occult and various religions, wondering what, if anything, she believed in. Now, between her newfound powers, Talon, and her friends, Jinx is sort of an eclectic Pagan, stringing together bits of everything in an effort to find something that makes sense.

For a *focus*, Camille selects the *World of Gods and Monsters* paradigm and combines *chaos magick*, *gutter magick* and *witchcraft* to form her practice. As instruments, she employs dice, booze, graffiti sigils, a handful of lucky coins, muttered prayers to Risk, offerings of her own blood, meditation, and insane stunts dedicated to Risk. Jinx literally offers herself as a sacrifice to Risk, employing her Acrobatics, Athletics, and other Traits to supplement her magick. In game terms, then, her seven focus instruments are *art*, *blood and fluids*, *cards and instruments of chance*, *meditation*, *offerings and sacrifices*, *ordeals and exertions*, and *prayers and invocations*. Meanwhile, she's studying the deeper levels of the Art with Khan, Synder, and their friends, with Talon as an inner goad, guide, and cheerleader.

Step Five

Regarding those Arts – specifically, the *Spheres* that Jinx is learning – Camille has already selected *Entropy* as Jinx's affinity. She figures that Jinx would also be learning *Forces* (from the fire-dancers), *Life* (as an extension of herself), and perhaps *Spirit* (communing with her Avatar and the spirits of the city). Depending on Jinx's Arete rating, there may or may not be enough points to get what Camille envisions for her character. So, Camille moves on to...

...Jinx's *Arete* rating. Because Jinx is a new mage, Camille decides that an Arete of 2 is good enough for her to start with. That way, Jinx has enough power and understanding to make things happen, but enough room to grow as the chronicle goes on. That decision also gives her more freebie points to spend on things other than Arete; at four freebies per dot, Arete is expensive. With an Arete of 2, Jinx is limited to Sphere Rank 2. Camille gives her Entropy 2, Life 2, Forces 1, and Spirit 1, which grants Jinx minor control over probability, allows her to heal herself, and lets her see the interplays of Forces and Spirit around her. Jinx becomes a young mage with formidable potential.

Camille continues with the *Willpower* Trait. As noted earlier, Jinx is stubborn but unfocused. Camille gives her the base Willpower of 5 and then records Jinx's starting *Quintessence and Paradox*. That high Avatar rating gives Jinx five points of Quintessence, with no Paradox as the game begins. The basic Traits are taken care of; now it's time to spend those 15 freebie points.

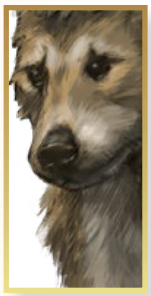
Four points go to buy Jinx that second Arete dot. Eight more points get spent on raising Jinx's Abilities: buying her Acrobatics up to 2 (two points), her Brawl up to 3 (two points), and her Streetwise up to 3 (four points). Camille asks James if Jinx can get a dot in *Area Knowledge: Seattle*, since she's communing with spirits of that city. James agrees, so two points buy that dot for her. Meanwhile, the Storyteller points out that two mage Allies are more powerful and useful than two-dot Allies; James suggests making Khan a *Mentor* instead. Camille puts her last freebie point into Mentor, leaves two dots in Allies to reflect Synder, and finishes the Traits-based portion of character creation.

Camille has been filling James in on Jinx's history throughout the process. To wind things up, she describes her mage as a teenage girl of European stock with a bit of Choctaw blood from her late father's side of the family. Jinx has chopped her hair into a roughly chin-length shag, dyed it (badly...) purple and blue, and accentuated her face with various piercings and thick eye makeup. Her solid athletic build is lost beneath overlarge death-metal T-shirts, a gray skull-camo hoodie, slashed-up black leggings, and her favorite ragged Utilikilt. A pair of battered Doc Martens complement a thrift-shop leather jacket several sizes too large for her. Although she's around 5'7", she looks shorter because of the loose clothing. Jinx has a wolf-pixie grin, often highlighted by a fresh bruise on her jaw from fighting. Fingerless gloves run halfway up her arms, covering her punch-roughened knuckles. Jinx looks like trouble, smells like a street kid, and makes both those things look good.

She doesn't own much, this young mage, but she's had most of her life to learn how to get a lot from very little. She shares a squat with Khan and Synder, and she spends a lot of time chatting with spirits and using Entropy and Life (channeled with her dice, lucky coins, and a few drops of blood) to encourage folks to give her money when she panhandles downtown.

Jinx scored a skateboard off a kid named Toby, and now she's learning how to ride it. Camille decides to make "*Dare Ya!*" into Jinx's Charisma 4 specialty; this way, she's got an edge when daring folks to do something idiotic. Meanwhile, she's become a sponge for occult secrets, hidden lore, and new ways to survive those long, wet, Seattle nights.

The Prelude



Before your chronicle gets underway, it's a good idea to have the Storyteller run a *prelude* for each character. This way, the players get a strong sense of their character's personalities while the Storyteller establishes a bond between the player, the character, and the chronicle's world. If, for example, the Storyteller wanted to run a tale based on magickal rock bands, then a series of preludes for each character might involve prior gigs: the audition that leads to one character joining the band; the day when one musician first sits down with her big brother and learns how to play her instrument; or the implosion of a previous band that sets the stage for the formation of the one that will dominate the coming chronicle.

A prelude also provides an excellent opportunity to find the sweet spots in a character (say, her preference for Irish cream or her aversion to tiny dogs) that might not have been apparent when the Traits were being chosen or to notice things that don't quite fit once you start to actually play with them (perhaps her combination of skateboarding and folk-singing as parts of her magickal focus). Best of all, though, a prelude provides a sort of Coming Attractions trailer for the main chronicle. Both the player and the Storyteller can set up foreshadowing, coin catchphrases, introduce supporting characters, or invent little details that pay off later on down the road. Idiosyncrasies you hadn't imagined back when your mage was a few jots on a piece of paper start to emerge when you take on that character's role. Once a prelude's underway, your character starts to become more *you*... and you, in turn, begin to invest more of yourself into the character.

As a general rule, set your prelude at some significant moment right before or right after your character's Awakening. By introducing the immediate impact of magick on your hero's life, you establish a foundation for the budding mage's beliefs *about* magick. A guy who Awakens during a Catholic Midnight Mass, for instance, will have a very different perception of what magick is, how it works, and what it means to him than would a person who Awakens during a car accident, a rave, or a vision quest in the North Dakota hills. Opening the prelude before your mage actually *becomes* a mage also shows you who he was back in his mundane days. Was he raised amidst the trappings of magick – perhaps as a modern Pagan, the son of a medicine man, or the designated heir of a Satanic cult? Maybe he grew up working in his mother's weird laboratory in the garage, or as an adopted kid groomed to be a Man in Black. Or was he, as so many of us are, raised with the idea that there's no such thing as magic – an idea he had to confront head-first on the day that reality exploded all around him? The prelude can give you a handle on such questions, showing you the human being beneath the Awakened mage.

Preludes don't really need dice or rules, nor do they require a full gaming session to run. The Storyteller can simply spend a few minutes with each player, narrating the prelude situation while the player responds in character. By setting up and playing out preludes before the actual chronicle begins, the Storyteller prepares the mood, tone, and setting of the game she wants to run. At the same time, players get opportunities to bond with their characters and work out whatever kinks might crop up between the player's vision of his mage and the way that mage actually plays out once the game begins.

Character Questions

When preparing for a role, an actor does his homework, hashing out details that probably won't show up on stage but might inform his performance. In the same vein, we recommend answering various questions about your mage before the tale begins. This way, you've got a solid foundation for your character, turning that list of Traits and facts into a vital, Awakened mage.

How Old Are You?

When was your character born? And how old is she when magick enters her life? The answers to those simple questions can provide major insights into your character's life and perspective, especially if she's significantly older or younger than you are. A character who was born in 1993 has a very different frame of reference than one who was born in 1983, 1973, or 2003; the music she listens to, the degree of life experience she has, the landmark events in the world around her – that character's birth date exerts a profound influence on those and many other factors.

Some folks Awaken as children, some when they're middle-aged, some even when they're elderly. The latter, though, is unusual. So – at which point of development does your mage's Avatar Awaken? If it happens during childhood, your mage could be a problematic prodigy. Adolescence may be the most common period for that surge of understanding, which says a lot about why many societies initiate their teenagers into clerical, mystical, scholarly, trade, craftsman, or military orders.

Awakening often follows young adulthood, too, usually when the impending mage graduates from school, joins the workforce, gets married, gets pregnant, or undergoes some other significant rite of passage. And then there are the folks who Awaken once they've settled into adulthood – typically in the wake of some trauma like death, firing, divorce, or a major crisis of faith.

Typically, the Avatar kicks up its metaphysical heels somewhere between late childhood and late middle age, while a person's still going through hormonal, social, and psychological life changes.

So when you answer questions about your character's age, think also about what's going on in his life at that point. The answer will tell you volumes about the way that person thinks, handles himself, and views his connection to magick and Awakened culture.

Where and How Were You Raised?

Was your mage cherished as a child? Neglected? Abused? Did she grow up in the city, a rural area, the wilderness? Is she from somewhere other than the chronicle's location – and if so, does she travel a lot, or is this a new thing? Some folks spend their lives in a single region, but these days the majority of people in an industrial culture travel a lot by the time they reach adulthood. Those factors will tell you plenty about your character's attitude, Abilities, Backgrounds, and beliefs.

Independent of *where* your mage grew up, there's the question of *how* she grew up. Was her family rich? Poor? Going rapidly from one to the other? Did her parents divorce, are they still together, or has one or both parents died? If dead, then how did that parent die? What about siblings? Extended family? Doting uncles or manipulative grandmothers? For better and worse, family shapes us all. Your mage's relationship with her family and upbringing influences the way she handles her Awakened life, most especially if she was either sheltered and indulged or neglected or abused. The relationships your mage builds with her mentor, teammates, enemies, lovers, and friends depends a lot on the kinds of relationships she had with the people who raised her and the circumstances of that childhood.

When Did You Notice You Were... Different?

Even before the Awakening, mages tend to have very odd lives. Weird events surround them, and weird people sometimes show up, offering to "train the Chosen One" or trying to get that future mage to "accept the Truth before it's too late!" Your mage might notice faeries in the woods, sense ghosts, or feel an affinity toward certain types of technology. Think about the sort of things that might have happened to the mage before the Avatar manifested in all its glory, and then tie them into your prelude and your character's beliefs.

Who Have Your Important Friends Been?

Everyone's got people who make huge impressions in their lives. So who did that for your mage? Was it the kid you used to play *Dungeons & Dragons* with in middle school? The boy next door you had a secret crush on, long before you knew how to deal with such things? Were there kids you hung out with after school, or a secret club where your friends met up, away from everyone else you knew? Important friends grow and change, coming into and going out of our lives. Some folks stick around for the long haul, whereas others

make their impact on us at significant times and then fade into distant memories. Figure out who the significant people in your character's life have been. Those people will *matter* in some way, even if they never show up in the chronicle itself.

What Were You Brought Up to Believe?

As we've already seen, belief is one of the most vital factors in a mage's life. So, speaking as the character, what were the beliefs you were raised with, how have they changed (assuming they *have* changed), and how do they shape the person you've become? Are you rebelling against your parents' religion, or perhaps against their *lack* of one? Were you raised by Pagans? Fundies? Strict adherents of a religious creed, or pure scientific materialists with no time or patience for such nonsense? What philosophies were you raised to accept? Did you take them to heart or run them over with your own ideological steamroller? The Arts you pursue and the tools you use to focus them come, in many ways, from the beliefs you embraced or rejected in your pre-Awakening life.

How Did You First Encounter Magick?

So did your character accept what was happening when her Avatar finally showed up and showed her what was possible? Or is she nurturing doubts about such things even now? How did her Awakening occur? Was it dramatic? Traumatic? Slow and gradual, or an unexpected blast of That Which She Could Not Deny? Obviously, an Awakened person *does* accept the existence of "magick" in some form – without that acceptance, she couldn't do the things she does. How, from your character's perspective, did you come to that acceptance? And does your character even call what she does magick?

(If your character possesses the wild talent described earlier in this book, check out the associated rules in Chapter Ten, pp. 527-528.)

Do You Have a Sense of Destiny?

Assuming that your mage accepts his place in the world, ask yourself where he sees himself fitting into it. Does he drift through life, taking on whatever it throws at him, or does he have specific future plans? Does she regard herself as a Chosen One, or is she resigned to being one mage among many? Does your fantasy counterpart view himself as the next Harry Potter, Merlin, or Anton LaVey? Does she consider herself the last line of defense against hordes of cosmic horror? Especially if your character has the Destiny Background, questions about what that destiny might be can lend extra urgency to your mage's quest.

How Do Your Beliefs Determine Your Focus?

Belief shapes practice, and practice determines tools. An Enlightened mechanic probably tinkers with devices and instruments, memorizes manuals, and employs gauges and shop space in order to get things done. An Ecstatic artist might paint himself with weird designs, drop acid, and throw himself off a cliff in order to master the secrets of Awakening. How does *your* character focus his Arts and put his beliefs into practice? Remember that *it's your character's beliefs, not your game system knowledge*, that guides your focus tools. Sure, it might be more convenient in a game-sense for you to choose a pendant, some gloves, a jacket, and a pair of sunglasses as your tools, but unless there's some compelling reason your character should *believe* in those tools (say, a bit of modification in a New World Order arsenal), they're probably not good focuses for your mage's Arts.

How Did You Meet Your Mentor(s)?

Who's the person who taught your character the things he needed to know? A friend? A lover? Perhaps the bully who beat you up after school until you blew her across the parking lot and she stood up, dusted herself off, and said "*Finally!* I was *wondering* when you'd show me what you had to offer!" In short, decide who opened the doors to your mage's Awakened life and then showed him (or is *still* showing him) how to walk through them without getting knocked ass-over-teakettle by the things he didn't know.

How Did You Join Your Faction?

Here's a key question for any mage: What inspired, or forced, you to join the group you belong to these days? Were you recruited by a charismatic Syndicate Manager? Seduced by a charming Ecstatic? Did the Chorister priest offer comfort when your world caved in? Were you raised in a Verbena family group and groomed to join that ancestral Tradition? Had you perhaps belonged to one group, only to defect to another? Were you maybe kidnapped by one sect from your original group, and then indoctrinated, willingly or otherwise, into joining the new team? Did you make a radical conversion, like going from the New World Order to the Akashayana or vice versa? Or did your original group betray your trust, lose your interest, or reveal a side of themselves that you refused to live with? In a situation where certain factions can and will kill members of rival groups – a situation that's not *always* a case of Traditions versus Technocracy – this is no simple question. The allegiance you choose often defines your mage's life among the Awakened.

How'd You Meet Your Current Associates?

Speaking of the company you keep, how did your character first encounter her immediate companions... and why does she stick with them now? Are they friends? Bandmates? Lovers? Relatives? Do they work together by the command of some higher authority, are they allies of convenience, or are they stuck with one another until the current crisis ends? Do they get along well, or are they gritting their teeth each time they put their lives in each other's hands? If the latter, how *can* a mage trust her companions, and how long does she think that trust will last? As mentioned earlier, in the ***Working Together*** section, your characters need a compelling reason to cooperate with one another. The more engaging you make their reasons for association, the tighter the group will be and the stronger your chronicle's foundation will be as a result.

How Do You See Your Avatar and the Relationship Between You Both?

Is your mage's Avatar a tormenting spirit? A cosmic trickster? A future version of himself? Does he see the Inner Genius as a vision of Einstein, a floating multicolored fractal pattern,

or a spectral whiteboard that keeps erasing and then writing on itself? Does he hear voices, like Joan d'Arc? See cloaked figures or six-armed weirdoes? Does he argue with his Avatar, dismiss it as a hallucination, or tremble as the Voice of God cuts into his very soul? The vision of your mage's Avatar, and the relationship between the Genius and the mage, remains one of the most significant elements of Awakened life. Especially if your character has a high Avatar Background Trait, take the time to figure out how the mage views that Awakened Self, deals with it, and fits it into the worldview he possesses... or, perhaps, understand how that *world* possesses *him*.

How Do You Now Deal With the Mundane World?

Surely your character doesn't hang out with mages *all* the time. Her family, her friends, her co-workers, even the folks she meets at the bar or while shopping – there must be some unAwakened souls among them. How, then, does she relate to people who can't warp reality with a thought, people whose lives revolve around Justin Bieber or their next dentist appointment, not around plasma guns or Horizon Realms? As most cops, soldiers, or musicians will tell you, it's hard to build a normal life when you've experienced things that most folks never dream of facing – harder still when your daily life involves a side of reality few people ever see. It's a real trick to interface with the unAwakened world when a mage has faced screaming horrors or blood-drenched Reality Deviants. How, then, does your mage manage that feat? The answer will tell you a lot of things about her personality, priorities, and perspective... not to mention her eventual goals in a War that remains hidden from unAwakened eyes.

Player Questions

Okay, so we've figured out how your *character* ticks. Now what do *you* want from this character? Answering a few short questions can help you get a stronger handle on your own motivations for playing this particular mage in this particular game. You don't have to puzzle out every element of your fantasy persona in exacting detail. If, however, you all know what you want ahead of time, then you, your Storyteller, and your fellow players will have a better plan for creating a game that's fun for everyone concerned.

What Do *You*, the Player, Want to Play?

So what sort of character speaks to you in **Mage**? A steampunk Frankenstein? A slick wizard in a thousand-dollar suit? A tattooed death-mage? A smartass dude or chick in a black leather trenchcoat, clove cigarette clenched between your teeth? Those archetypes – and many more besides – speak to our imaginations. When you pick one of them and say "*I wanna play that!*", then you're essentially, as Jim Morrison put it, taking a face from the gallery and walking down the hall with it. The more conscious you are about your selection, the better an idea you'll have about what to do with it when the game begins.

How Do You See Your Character Growing as the Chronicle Goes On?

On a similar note, what sort of stories do you want to tell with this character? Warped satires? Tragic romance? Do you want to kick the shit out of all the fuckers you can't deal with in real life? Or are you cool with whatever the Storyteller throws at you? Knowing your expectations ahead of time can help both you and your Storyteller meet those expectations. If you don't know what you want to do, after all, then how can your Storyteller meet those expectations with an exciting and fulfilling tale?

Beyond those initial challenges, your fantasy persona will grow and change. One of the truths in **Mage**, after all, is that magick transforms you even as you transform your world. Do you see your mage becoming a great Master? A renegade? A madman? Will she venture into the Otherworlds or clean up her corner of the neighborhood? In a way, such questions plot your character's destiny. If you have some idea where you want it to lead, then you have a chance to shape its path... and to be surprised by the things you never saw coming until they hit.

How Is This Character an Aspect of Your Real-World Self?

On a deeper level, the things we create become reflections of our selves. When you choose that archetypal mask and mold it to your own wishes, it becomes a part of you. Sure, **Mage** is, on many levels, just a game; it's *fiction*, and please don't ever lose sight of that fact. Still, the fantasies we embrace say a lot about the people we are in real life – the things we want to accomplish and experience, the fights we wish to win, the values we cherish or reject when we've got the opportunity to do so safely.

A roleplaying game presents safe space for such fantasies. You won't break your neck if you fail your character's climbing roll. Knowing that, what does the mage you want to play say about the person you want to be? Where are the connections between your fantasy persona and the real you? What is it about the archetype you've chosen that speaks to some aspect of yourself? Best of all, how can the things you experience vicariously through your imaginary creation benefit you in your day-to-day life? In real life, there are gamers out there who learn history or culture, who travel to new places or dare real-world challenges, because of the inspiration they find in games. That's powerful stuff, and although you should be careful with it (we *do* ***not*** recommend breaking into office buildings to crack the Curse of the Fox News Zombies), you can enhance your real-world life by examining the places where imagination takes you.

Ask yourself, then, as you craft your mage: *How is she like me, and how am I like her?* The answers may surprise you, challenge you, and perhaps even change your life.

Part II: Character Traits

As we mentioned earlier, the various Traits reflect the game systems side of your character's abilities. Through a collection of dice, represented by dots, you determine the mage's success or failure, as well as his overall strengths and weakness with certain kinds of tasks. Although certain types of Traits, specifically the Essences and Archetypes, don't have dots or dice pools, all the following characteristics deal with the gaming side of your mage and tie into the systems featured throughout Book III, in **Chapters Eight**, **Nine**, and **Ten**.

Avatar Essences

As we've seen earlier, the Essence reflects the personality of your mage's Avatar. By extension, it also influences the mage himself. In many regards, the Essence gives you a general script for your character's behavior. His goals, his habits, the way he approaches life and all its mysteries – all may be guided by the mage's Essence.

The Awakened themselves disagree about the role, nature, and purpose of an Essence. Reincarnationists view such tendencies as the legacies of past lives, whereas big-picture metaphysicians point toward the Metaphysic Trinity and the spaces between its forces. Technocrats dismiss such mystic rubbish, seeing instead the psychological profiles of Enlightened personalities. There are folks who see Essence as directives from Almighty God, and others who speak of Pure Ones who continually reincarnate their cosmic identities in Earthly vessels. As with magick itself, the truth about your mage's Essence will depend – at least in that character's eyes – on the beliefs he holds about his place in Creation.

Most often, the Avatar and its Essence reveal themselves as personality quirks, subtle nudges, dreams, hallucinations, déjà vu, and feelings of something or someone being just right or totally wrong to the mage in question. A Dynamic Essence mage feels restless, driven, impassioned, and hyperactive; his Pattern companion might be more settled, reliable, one of those good head on her shoulders types with a solid approach toward life. A Questing vagabond rarely sticks around one place for long, and the enigmatic Primordial soul gazes at her surroundings with eerie calm and an agenda no one else can fathom. Despite broad connections between the four Essences and the Ascension War factions – Dynamic for Marauders, Pattern for Technocrats, Questing for the Traditions, and Primordial for the Nephandi – all four Essences can be found in every faction... including the ones who want no part of that War.

The stronger the Avatar, the greater its influence; one or two dots in Avatar manifest as simple hunches, whereas four- or five-dot ones achieve full-blown identities. An Avatar's manifestations are often tied to its Essence nature. Although human beings seem more complex – defined more by Nature, Demeanor, and personal choice than by cosmic forces – the Avatars that push mages themselves often display the Essence in obvious ways. Dynamic Avatars take ferocious forms, driving their mortal hosts like children before demonic whips. A Pattern Genius could manifest as that feeling of rightness when a carpenter grabs his hammer and a gazes at a stack of planks. The Questing Avatar might blow through a mage's hair like an eternal breeze, cooling her skin even in the still desert air, whereas the Primordial Avatar pools deep in a wizard's subconscious, filling his head with visions that defy definition yet demand answers in the light of day.

During the age of High Magick, the Essences were identified by elements (Dynamic/ Fire, Pattern/ Earth, Questing/ Air, Primordial/ Water) and mythic creatures. Viewed by some mages as diagrams of the soul, these tendencies appeared to be marks of predestination. And although modern mages often assert

Genius Eidolons: The Technocratic Essence

Operatives of the Technocratic Union refuse to accept superstitionist babble about avatars and essences. Such concepts are merely the archaic excuses for perfectly understandable psychiatric phenomena. Still, even the most hardened scientists must accept overwhelming evidence, so the concept of *Eidolons* – constructs of a person's Enlightened Genius – remains an open secret among Technocratic personnel.

For all practical purposes, Eidolons and Essences are exactly the same thing. But in the world of **Mage**, perception and belief are the foundations of reality. Thus, a Technocrat or former Technocrat will utterly deny the existence of a metaphysical soul essence. Reality Deviants may have their silly little soul-faces, but a good Technocrat knows what such things *really* are: wisps of imagination wrapped around perfectly sensible expressions of Genius!

Even so, Technocrats don't like to discuss these wisps of imagination. Oh, it's acceptable to mention one's dreams upon occasion, but a Technocrat who discusses dreams as if they *mean* something may soon find himself in hot water. Dreams, then, are where Genius Eidolons run wild. If and when such phantasms manifest in clear view during waking hours, a smart Technocrat will keep such fancies to himself if he knows what's good for him... which, of course, he *does*.

that "I am no one's pawn," there *does* appear, at times, to be a greater force – or perhaps four or five forces – manipulating mages toward some greater end.

That fifth force, *Infinite*, remains enigmatic. Sages say that it must exist, but if it does, no one's actually seen it. In game terms, it's hard to say what an Infinite Essence might look like. We recommend that player characters probably shouldn't have such an option, but perhaps a weird Storyteller character could embody that sort of Avatar, staring at the world with eyes and heart that reach past mere human understanding and into realms even mages can't yet comprehend.

Dynamic

The Dynamic Essence embodies Change itself. Manifesting as a mercurial temperament, passionate emotions, restless drive, and fickle spirits, Dynamic Avatars compel their mages toward daring experiences. Such people are never boring company! A Dynamic mage might drag you out for a night on the town that includes hijacking a taxi, skateboarding down a railroad track, and slumping into bed just after dawn with a huge grin (or a terrified grimace) on your face, just to wake up a few hours later and see what trouble you can get into next.

In more subtle forms, this Essence inspires curiosity, impatience, and sudden flashes of brilliance. Appearing in the form of shadows, whispers, and poor impulse control, it goads a mage to treat every day like an adventure. At higher levels, a Dynamic Avatar can nag a person mercilessly, leaving half-finished projects and shattered relationships in the wake of a mage who rarely sits still for long.

Pattern

The very opposite of Dynamism, the Pattern Essence provides stability and order. If Dynamism is fire, then Pattern is stone. Pattern mages approach things with deliberate intent, speaking slowly and taking time to consider the potential risks and benefits of a task. Manifesting as calm temperament, sound logic, stable emotions, and authority figures (often in dreams, perhaps as people only the mage herself can see), Pattern Avatars settle the capricious whims of reality into solid, dependable forms.

Because every war needs fortifications and dependable souls, the Pattern Essence is a valued asset. Such Avatars inspire their mages to be prudent, constructive, and trustworthy – real bricks, to use the British slang. Honor, stability, and good judgment are hallmarks of such people. If they seem stodgy or uninspired, it's simply because other people are too shortsighted to recognize a true friend when they have one.

Primordial

Before light and order existed, Primordial Chaos was the Essence of the universe. Even now, that eternal enigma beckons to the human soul in the shape of eerie and often sinister Avatar-forms. Manifesting as shadows; half-heard cries; swirling vortices of pulsating energy; or the disconcerting figures of madmen, ghosts, and squamous *things*, this Essence reflects the depthless reaches of cosmic potential. Mages connected to this Essence tend to be abrupt and secretive, or else seductive in ways that Fallen souls can best appreciate.

A Primordial mage loves mystery. Like deep water, she seeps into hidden places and defies easy understanding. Whereas Pattern people are bricks or stone, Primordial folks are riptides and dark pools. The few Technocrats who favor this Essence understand that no science can penetrate the richest mysteries of the universe; they'll give lip service to technology, but they always keep a few extra cards up their sleeves for the time when the light fails and order becomes a punch line in the cosmic jest.

Questing

Wherever windmills beckon, you'll find Questing mages preparing to tilt. Vagabonds and errants, pilgrims, and pioneers, these people prefer the open road and a worthy cause. Epitomizing Balance in the Trinity, this Essence avoids extremes. Questing Avatars tend to manifest as yearning; wanderlust; bright spots on the horizon; and people, beasts, or entities associated with travel. One might look like a stray hound, another like a kaleidoscope, and a third like a hitchhiker on the side of the road. Whereas the Primordial mage curls up in the shadows, the Questing mage straps on her backpack, straps on or discards entirely her shoes, and heads off to face adventures in the Great Unknown.

"Call Me the Breeze" makes a good theme song for such characters. Their Avatars draw them ever onward. Sure, these souls might seem friendly and fun enough; in time, however, they'll disappear into the rising dawn, secure in the knowledge that someone else will follow the trails they've blazed.

Personality Archetypes: Nature and Demeanor

Archetype means "ruling impression." In Jungian terms, it refers to certain significant figures that inspire human tales and behavior. For **Mage**, the personality Archetypes provide roleplaying guidance, offer potential motivations, and give you a way of contrasting your mage's outer guise with her inner truth. Think of them as a Tarot deck of sorts: a series of symbolic figures that reflect human experience. A Trickster Archetype, for instance, represents the clown whose tricks conceal a deeper lesson, inspire caution, and point out just how vulnerable you might be if you don't keep your wits about you.

As we saw earlier, each **Mage** character has two Archetypes: the obvious Demeanor and the inner Nature. These Archetypes could be *similar*, but will rarely be the *same*; even the most honest people need their secrets, after all. From your character's

perspective, Demeanor is how you present yourself to other folks, and Nature is how you see yourself when all your masks come off. In the ruthless world of the Awakened Ones, it's dangerous to let people know too much about you, so pick your character's mask carefully – he'll be wearing it for quite a while.

Demeanor Traits are easy enough to change – you just start acting differently and choosing new priorities in life. Nature, on the other hand, is difficult to change. It takes a life-shifting circumstance to cause such transitions, and you might not even recognize yourself in the mirror when such a shift occurs.

In game terms, the Nature also provides you with an opportunity to refresh your Willpower Trait. When you accomplish something that's in tune with your Nature, your Storyteller might give you one to three Willpower points to replace the ones you've spent over the course of the story. This benefit applies only to refreshing a depleted Willpower Trait – you don't get new Willpower dots for acting according to your Nature. When you purchase new Willpower dots, however, you can help justify that boosted Will if you've been successfully following your Nature.

Every Archetype has its strengths and weaknesses. Consider that strength to be the inner spark that inspires you to persevere when things get rough. Your Archetypal weakness, on the other hand, reflects a personal flaw – some obstacle in your Path to Ascension and a stumbling block in daily life. Both aspects combine to make you, for better and worse, the person you are.

The entries below offer a sample of the potential range of Awakened Archetypes. Feel free to create new ones that suit your character's personality and vision, so long as those new Archetypes have strengths, weaknesses, and a way to restore your Willpower when you kick ass, take names, and fulfill the purpose of your Nature.

Activist

The world is broken. Help fix it. Speak truth to power, dig up secrets, call people out on their shit, and reveal your plans for a better world to anyone who will listen. While apathetic cowards sit back and tune out, you step up and do whatever needs doing. Sure, folks might consider you a pain in the ass, but at least you're making a difference!

Action is your greatest strength. You're not one to sit things out. There's no time to waste on mindless self-indulgence and no room to stay scared of what might happen. The wolf's already halfway through the door, and you refuse to let that bastard win.

Even so, your constant **Outrage** wears thin. There's never room to sit back and enjoy life. As far as you're concerned, complacency is a sin. Your fury's *justified*, of course, but it gets old all the same. Before you can truly Ascend, you've got to balance righteous pyrotechnics with calm acceptance. Life never has been – and never will be – perfect. Finding a place of serenity within your storm is an essential part of your transcendence.

– Regain Willpower when you successfully confront abuse, right wrongs, or reveal an actual conspiracy and, by doing so, bring it down.

Benefactor

It's a cruel world, but you make things easier. Generous sometimes to a fault, you supply whatever you can provide: money, advice, protection, maybe just a shoulder when someone really needs to cry. You can't just turn blind eyes to suffering and need. It's your moral duty to do whatever you can do to make things right. When things get tough, you call upon your inner White Knight and charge in, bringing gifts, guidance, and occasional force when nothing else will do.

Altruism is all too rare, especially in the World of Darkness. Helping people is your pleasure. Magick, as far as you're concerned, is a tool for helping folks less fortunate than yourself. To do less is an abuse of the powers you possess.

On the flipside, though, you often feel **Obligation** even when you're not actually needed. This, in turn, can become resentment – both on your part and on the parts of people who now feel, rightly or wrongly, that they owe you. Sometimes, you just need to back off, chill out, and let people do things for themselves. Martyrdom isn't always the best Path toward Ascension.

– Regain Willpower when you provide help that someone else desperately needs. The key here is that desperate part. Teaching Sunday school isn't meeting that level of need; if you used your Arts to assist autistic kids, however, you'd clearly be making a difference in their lives.

Contrary

Inversion is an essential part of real life. For every rule, there must be exceptions. You live to turn things inside out, undercutting assumptions by showing their weak foundations. You're the Devil's Advocate, pointing out flaws by embodying the opposite of what folks expect.

A successful Contrary displays **Insight**; your inversions succeed because they point to a deeper truth. If you're serious about this path (that is, if you're an actual *Contrary*, not simply an asshole), then you're a jester with a clue. That ability to see beyond appearances is extremely useful in the Awakened realm.

And yet, your perpetual **Subversion** can be annoying, intrusive, and outright destructive. Certain assumptions really *are* true, and inverting them doesn't provide any particular wisdom. If you seriously want to reach beyond appearances, you have to realize that your own contrariness can be its own limitation. True wisdom comes through a balance between rejection and acceptance.

– Regain Willpower whenever your inversion of expectations leads folks to realize how false those expectations had been.

Crusader

People need a hero, and you're there to fill that role. Driven by a higher purpose – religious conviction, moral ethics, a philosophical ideal – you strive for a better world. The sword you wield might be more symbolic than literal: a scientist or teacher can be a Crusader too. The struggle, though, is what defines you. A better future must be built upon the foundations of our flawed world, and your duty compels you to demolish the obstacles so that reconstruction can begin.

Your admirable **Zeal** propels you through every challenge you face. Lesser souls might falter, but you will not.

Fanaticism, though, is the mark of a Crusader. Your convictions leave little room for compromise. When *everything* looks like a nail, it's hard to stop hammering. Until and unless you learn to temper your enthusiasm and question your own assumptions, you're just chasing shadows of your own extremism.

– Regain Willpower when you accomplish some great deed in the name of your higher goal. As a player, you need to define what that higher goal is, and then follow it even when it hurts you. A true Crusader's beliefs are not governed by convenience.

Hacker

Every system is a locked vault, and you've got the keys. If you don't have ones that work, you'll make new ones – that's half the fun of life, after all! Puzzles excite you; limits just piss you off. Especially given the sheer amount of abuse that's built into any system, the world needs folks like you to tear down impediments and set reality free.

Imagination is your greatest strength. You see things not as they *are*, but as they *could be* once you get done with them! Driven to dismantle existing systems and then put them together in interesting new shapes, you tend to pepper your compulsions with sincerely-held philosophy. You're not a *vandal*, for crying out loud – you're a visionary who refuses to accept shit sandwiches handed out as lunch.

Sometimes, though, you go too far. **Perversity** leads you to tear apart things that weren't broken... things that may, in fact, have been better left alone. Although it might seem philosophically valid to tear down the wards on a wizard's lab, those wards might have been laid that way for reasons you didn't understand until it was a little too late.

– Regain Willpower when you detect a flaw in some important structure, system, or device, or else when you puzzle out a way to improve something that was supposedly designed well to begin with.

Idealist

Cowards accept what *is*. You know how much better things *will be* once the flaws in the system have been purged. Guided by a great ideal – spiritual devotion, political philosophy, scientific theory, compassionate humanity – you refuse to remain shackled by defeatism. Your Ideal is *correct*. You know this to be true. Now is the time to bring it about. Once you do, everyone else will see just how wrong they've been... and how right you are.

Conviction is your life's blood. Whether you're a scientist chasing inspiration, a theorist assured that *this* theory cannot fail, a religious devotee, or some other sort of Idealist, you possess near-unshakable faith in your ideal – the kind of faith that shapes reality.

Like most fanatics, though, you're **Dogmatic** to a fault. Blind to any potential flaws, you'll fight – sometimes literally

– to assure the truth of your beliefs. *All* mages are idealists to a point; in your case, though, this devotion seems stifling. When (not if, *when*) reality falls short of your ideals, you might wind up depressed, violent, or – as with many Marauders – insane.

– Regain Willpower when your beliefs are tested to the breaking point yet do not fail.

Innovator

There's always a better way. You spend your life looking for methods and inventions that improve on what has gone before. Sure, past achievements are wonderful enough... but if you just add *this*, shift *that*, approach the issue from *this other* angle instead, then you'll make a good thing that much better or fix an obvious flaw in a promising design.

Creativity is your strong point. No practice, tool, or traditional method is too good for improvement, especially not at this crucial point in human evolution. Let other people follow the established paths – you're busy drawing up the next road toward a goal most folks don't even know exists.

Your **Restless Unorthodoxy**, though, can get you in trouble. Especially if you belong to a sect or faction based on established results and protocols (the Technocracy, the Hermetic Order, the Akashayana, and so on), your innovations might be someone else's heresy. Many mages have been burnt at stakes both literal and symbolic for doing the things you do, and a missed step could make (an) ash of you.

– Regain Willpower when your inspiration leads to a helpful new breakthrough.

Kid

Either young in years or young at heart, you give the impression of needing to be taken care of by older, wiser folks. That impression may be deceiving, but you're glad to use it to your best advantage. You could be an actual child – somewhere between post-toddlerhood and late adolescence – or chronologically an adult with a childlike personality. Whatever your actual age might be, your concerns are simple, capricious, and typically self-involved.

There's a kind of **Innocence** to you, and it provides the source of your strength. People want to protect that sense of wonder and hope and tend to offer you a compassion they might not feel toward other folks.

The extreme of innocence, though, is **Immaturity**. Trusting too easily, acting too rashly, jumping into things without considering their potential consequences... you're guilty of all these things and more. You can slide from charming child to spoiled brat in the space between two heartbeats, and the traits that inspire people to take care of you can become infuriating as well. If and when you want to reach a higher state, you'll have to put certain childish things aside.

– Regain Willpower when you bring out the nurturing side of someone who doesn't normally care much for other people.

Loner

Fuck the world. Everything you need in life you've got inside yourself. Even in the middle of a crowd, you're alone... or at least, you *feel* that way. People don't understand you, and you don't care enough to try to understand them. It's not that you're a sociopath or anything (although you just *might* be one) so much as it's that you just don't connect with that whole social animal thing at all.

Self-Reliance is your blessing. You're so used to doing everything yourself that you rarely depend on another person's aid. Ascension, so far as you understand it, is a solitary task, so why bother asking for assistance with that goal?

Trouble is, your **Disconnection** cuts you off from empathy and the wealth of human experience. Until and unless you let down the barriers and connect with other living things, you're doomed to a lonesome and limited existence.

– Regain Willpower when you achieve some meaningful goal without help from anyone else, especially if your accomplishment benefits other people too.

Machine

Flesh is weak. You are not. Whether or not you're an actual cyborg, you have the relentless drive of a Terminator on PCP. Flaws do not concern you. Limits are for the mewling meatbags known as human beings. Compassion is for weaklings. Fatigue is for lesser entities. If and when you fall short of perfection, you understand that such failure is just a challenge to do better next time.

A **Diligent, Stoic** creature, you push yourself to the limits of endurance. Everything you do is done to exacting standards, without complaint or hesitation. The Technocratic Union loves operatives like you.

As far as other people are concerned, however, you're **Creepy and Prone to Burn-Out**. Whatever illusions you harbor about your perfection, you're as flawed as any other mortal thing. Even machines have limits, and unless you learn to acknowledge your own, you're headed toward the scrap heap, not Ascension.

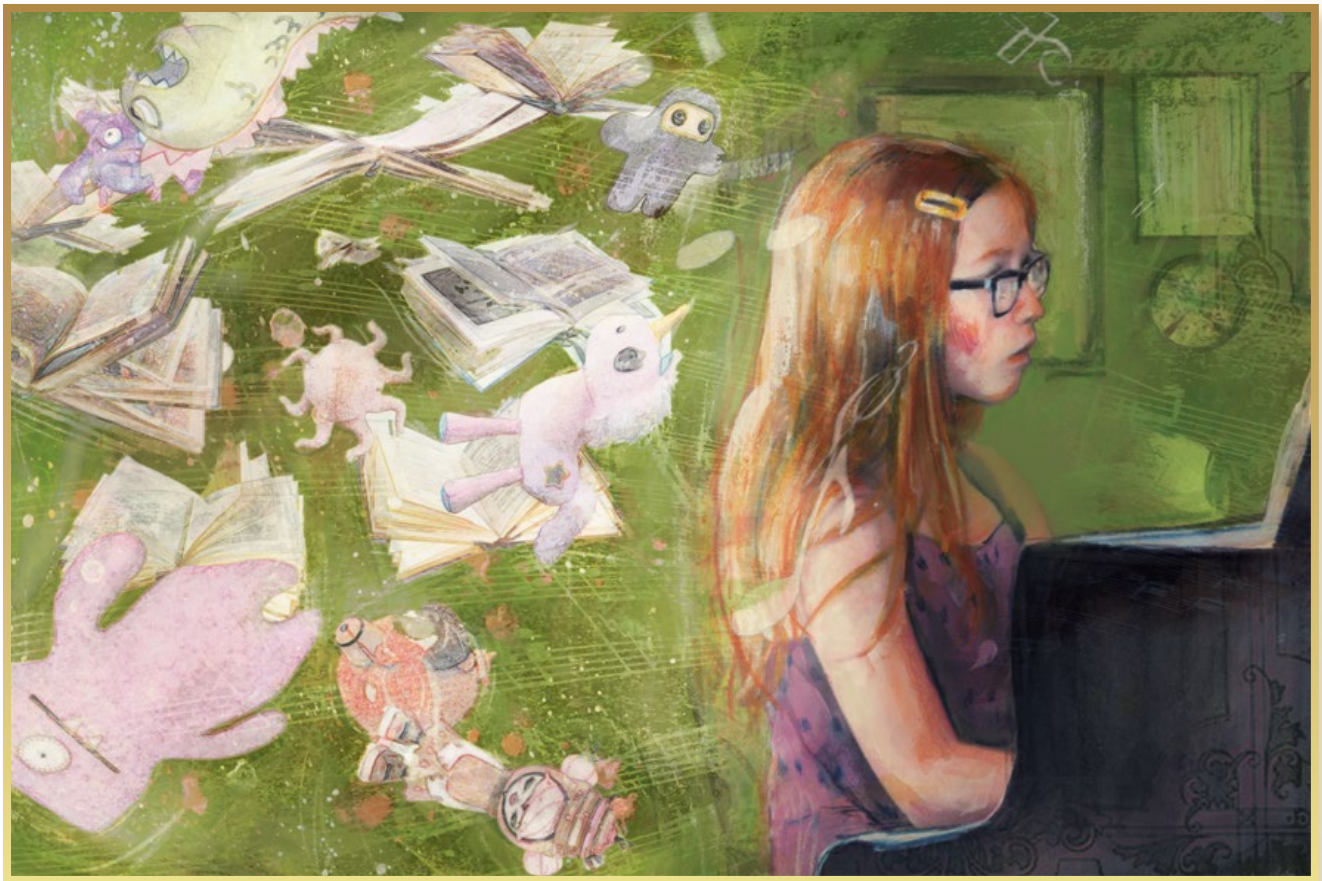
– Regain Willpower when you transcend the limits of mere flesh, bone, and steel, accomplishing something that no one else has managed to do.

Mad Scientist

Science is not a field for cowards and fools. You understand that technology expands only when brave souls such as yourself dare the unthinkable and push past the established norms of hidebound preconceptions. Yes, those cowards and fools *do* falter when they behold the scope of your temerity. Let them! Just as Vesalius defied taboos when he performed dissections or Galileo challenged the Church with his discoveries, so too must other visionaries stand firm and expand the reach of science... visionaries including, of course, yourself.

You do, in fact, have **Vision**. It's probably your greatest strength. Pursing that vision despite all obstacles, you move the boundaries of reality through sheer determination.

Problem is, you are **Batshit Insane**. There are *reasons* that other people have not dared the things you do or, if they have, that they're reviled names in the Halls of Infamy. The Technocracy, Virtual Adepts, and especially the Etherites might depend upon minds like yours, but they also keep a wary eye out for the times when you'll go too far – because you *will*.



– Regain Willpower when you successfully bend the rules of your technomancer sect while still applying something that seems oddly like science (see the sidebar SCIENCE!!!, p. 290) and manage to avoid invoking Paradox. This feat should feature a bizarre stroke of ingenuity that *shouldn't* work and yet somehow *does*. (Simply using magick does not count – after all, you're not some kind of *sorcerer!*)

Martyr

It's your glory to sacrifice yourself for the greater good. Precisely what this greater good looks like is up to you. It's probably based on a religious creed – possibly, but not necessarily, Islam or Christianity. Then again, you may want to give your all for a secular cause you believe in, maybe a political ideology, a philosophical ideal, or simply the opportunity to be heroic in ways only you can perform. This sacrifice doesn't *have* to be fatal, though it'll probably wind up being terminal eventually. Until then, you tend to put yourself in a position to suffer so that someone else might thrive.

Sacrifice is a mighty thing in magick. The willingness to surrender one's self to a greater end is one of the most obvious (and famous) Paths toward Ascension.

That said, such **Self-Deprecation** can have unfortunate consequences far beyond simple hazards to your health. Martyrs tend to get on people's nerves, wind up being taken advantage of, and deal with abuse that has nothing to do with the greater good. Worse, perhaps, people like you often resent the beneficiaries of their sacrifice, many of whom might not want you to sacrifice yourself at all.

– Regain Willpower whenever you manage to make a noticeably positive difference in someone else's situation by giving deeply of yourself.

Monster

Heaven lacks glory without the threat of Hell. It's your noble chore, then, to be the Agent of Infamy. An obvious choice for Nephandic mages (though not, by a long shot, exclusive to their kind), this Archetype embodies unapologetic villainy. As Voltaire (the singer, not the philosopher) put it, "It's so easy when you're evil"... easy, fun, and satisfying!

You **Reveal Dark Truths** that many people are afraid to face. When you show up, Pollyanna runs screaming for the hills. Your existence undercuts the comfortable lies of polite society. *Anyone* can play a hero, but a memorable villain is worth his weight in blood.

The problem, of course, is that you're **Depraved**. There *might* be a heroic heel-turn in your future, but that's unlikely. Chances are, you're headed for the Cauls; if you haven't Fallen with the Nephandi already, you probably will soon enough.

– Regain Willpower by performing spectacular acts of heartlessness and ruin.

Prophet

Speaking capital-T *Truth*, you bring a sacred message to a wounded world. That message might not necessarily be religious, though it's at least got religious undertones. Regardless of its nature, it's capital-I *Important* in ways that simple opinions could never be. Traditionally, a prophet becomes the chosen representative of Truth, throwing light into shadowed corners and forcing folks to look at their own hypocrisies. It's not an easy cross to bear, but Truth will not be denied for long.

Insight is your greatest strength. Prophets tend to see things that are hidden to most people: secrets, omens, visions of the future, and so forth. Even if you lack the blessing/ curse of prophecy, few mysteries escape your sight.

Ruthlessness is the traditional flaw of prophets. Driven by their vision of Truth, such people tend to be impatient, fanatical, and defiant of mortal power. You'll probably score lots of points for guts, but you might find those guts roasting on a spit in some ruler's torture garden. True prophets often meet unhappy ends... and they tend to take their followers down with them when they go.

– Regain Willpower when you speak Truth to power and inspire a successful change.

Rogue

You make rebellion look good. More than just some scruffy malcontent, you challenge convention with stylish dispatch. Attitude is your first, last and middle name, and it's the only label you accept. You give not one precious fuck for authority, and when you finally head towards that Big Dirt Nap, you plan to go out laughing.

Defiance is your life's blood, the pillar of your soul.

Your problem, though, is **Selfishness**. So dedicated are you to your own individuality that you'll ignore the concerns of other folks. Before you can become a valuable part of your society (much less a candidate for transcendence), you'll have to learn to let go of your own whims and take the bigger picture into account.

– Regain Willpower whenever you manage to score a victory against the forces of oppressive authority.

Sensualist

Sensation is a drug to you. The jittery rush of adrenaline, the caress of this week's lover on your skin, the raspy pull of a brush through messy hair, even the dull burn of a broken heart – you chase those dragons with bright abandon. The obvious choice for an Ecstatic mage, this compulsion finds new expressions in the Art of magick. The first thing you learn in each Sphere, after all, is perception. For someone like you, that's all the reason in the world you need in order to learn each Sphere and savor its sensations.

Receptiveness is your gift. Your devotion to sensuality inspires you to challenge yourself. You're not shy about sharing, either, and your delight in even the most painful stimulations can get other people to explore them with you too.

Hedonism is your curse. Those indulgences can drive you to do stupid, reckless, selfish things. You tend to haul other folks along with you for the ride, and although *you* might cherish the resulting agonies, your companions are less likely to appreciate them... or you... after a few disasters.

– Regain Willpower when you get a chance to revel in some potent sensual experience... especially if you get to share with someone else. (Novelty, though, is key; when you do the same thing over and over just to get a rush, that rush fades to boredom in no time.)

Survivor

Nothing stops you. Hardened by previous ordeals, you've developed a sense of self-preservation that keeps you going when lesser souls surrender to the odds. You've got little patience or sympathy for people who won't do whatever it takes to endure hardship. "Shut up and step up or get the fuck out of my way" is your motto. Other folks might not make it through, but *their* weakness won't lead to *your* death.

Perseverance is your defining trait. You do what you need to do with what you have to work with. Obstacles are just logistics, and excuses never healed a broken leg.

Your weakness, though, is a profound **Callousness**. You've shut down so much in order to keep going that folks often wonder if you feel anything at all.

– Regain Willpower whenever you survive a difficult situation through stubborn cunning and a refusal to give in.

Traditionalist

Devoted to tradition, you preserve the legacy of bygone wisdom. New ideas are shaky, untested by time, and thus flawed. The Old Ways often *are* best. They were good enough for our ancestors, and they'll be good enough for future generations too.

Your **Consistency** is a virtue. Especially in an age like ours, in which novelty defines mainstream culture, it's good to have someone as authentic and dependable as you.

Rigidity, though, can destroy you. Stasis tends to lead to Entropy, especially where mages are concerned. Though your dedication to tradition is admirable enough, you'll need to learn some flexibility if you want to adapt in this age and eventually transcend it.

– Regain Willpower when your efforts prove the value of old-fashioned ways.

Trickster

The world is your plaything. People are your toys. A Lord or Lady of Misrule, you work an eternal scam against the dull background of everyday existence. Unlike the Contrary, you're less interested in political subversion than in personal gratification. It's not that you don't *care* about your companions – you do. Still, when life is one big joke, it's better to be the setup than the punchline.

Cleverness is your claim to fame. Your tricks display considerable flair. Unbound by typical concerns, you upend the order of gods and kings. Nothing holds you back except the few scruples you might actually possess.

Untrustworthiness is your crown of thorns. Charming as you might be, there's an edge to you that smart people perceive. Your own tricks often backfire on you too, leaving you with less than you'd had at the beginning of that scheme. If and when you want something better for yourself, you'll need to know when to stop laughing and start taking ownership of your actions and their consequences.

– Regain Willpower when your clever plans result in a big gain for you and your companions or a big loss for your enemies.

Visionary

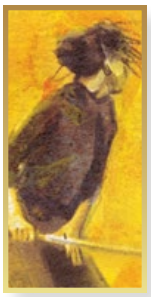
Beyond typical perception, there's something *more*. You see it, though few other people do. Even by mage standards, you're a radical seer. Though you spend lots of time and energy chasing your vision, that deeper goal is worth whatever its search might cost.

Inspiration guides your steps, inspiring you to see what others can't or won't perceive. You visualize some great ideal – the return of your people's glory, a world-changing technology, a path toward Earth's redemption, that sort of thing – with the passion of a true believer.

Your weakness, though, is **Pride** in your stubborn search for truth. To Ascend, you must learn humility, seeking visions that other people can enjoy as well.

– Regain Willpower when you convince folks that your vision is worth their devotion too, or when your actions turn your vision into practical reality.

Attributes



When your character's trying to dance a waltz, fast-talk a cop, or find an elusive fact in a pile of grimoires, her chances of success depend upon innate Attributes. Even if she doesn't have the associated Abilities, her Physical, Social, and Mental Traits give her a slim chance of success.

The core of most dice pools, your Attributes follow a human range between 1 and 5. Magick and other paranormal sources can raise or lower those Attributes beyond that range, but a typical willworker rates somewhere between 1 and 4 in his Attributes, with exceptional mages rating a 5. The average person, by comparison, probably has Attributes ranging between 1 and 3; ratings of 4 or 5 are pretty rare, and ones above 5 are essentially inhuman. Such high ratings might be common among vampires or magical beasts, perhaps, but not among mortal human beings… which, for all their power, is what mages essentially *are*.

Physical

Mages tend to favor brains over brawn. Even so, raw physicality is a vital part of certain pursuits. Shamans, witches, feral shapeshifters, and badass motherfuckers have high Physical Traits, often honed by tough lifestyles and demanding practices.

Strength

A measure of sheer physical might, this Trait reflects your ability to move obstacles, lift things, and deal out damage with your fists and feet alone. High-Strength characters tend to be muscular and massive; that said, wiry folks can be surprisingly, even deceptively, strong.

- • Poor: You can lift roughly 40 lb. (about 20 kg).
- •• Average: You lift around 100 lb. (about 50 kg).
- ••• Good: You lift around 250 lb. (a little over 100 kg).
- •••• Exceptional: You can lift 400 lb. (close to 200 kg).
- ••••• Outstanding: You can lift 650 lb. (nearly 300 kg).

Suggested Specialties: Lean, Deceptive Strength, Raw Power, Iron Grip

Dexterity

A vital attribute for conjurers, dancers, martial artists, and street survivors, this Trait measures agility, coordination, reflexes, and physical grace. High-Dexterity individuals seem poised and flexible even at rest, whereas low-Dexterity folks trip – figuratively and literally – over their own feet.

- • Poor: Fumble-fingers!
- •• Average: Coordinated enough for everyday life.
- ••• Good: Quick-fingered and sure-footed.
- •••• Exceptional: Flowing poise and animal grace.
- ••••• Outstanding: Cats regard you with envy.

Suggested Specialties: Smooth, Graceful, Nimble, Feline Reflexes, Hand-Eye Coordination

Stamina

Reflecting toughness, endurance, and your tolerance for pain, disease, and fatigue, Stamina is a helpful Trait for mages on the go. Although the stereotypical tough customer is a massive human tank, wiry folks can be amazingly resilient.

- • Poor: Frail and sickly.
- •• Average: Typically healthy.
- ••• Good: Hardy and tenacious.
- •••• Exceptional: Built for the long haul.
- ••••• Outstanding: Nothing seems to wear you down.

Suggested Specialties: Tireless, Tough, Tenacious, Inexhaustible, Energizer Bunny

Social

The glue that holds human life together, social interaction depends upon the following Traits. It's easy to dismiss the importance of good looks or social savvy, but smart mages realize the inherent magic of sweet smiles and honey-baited words.

Specialties

Attribute and Ability Traits have an additional element that can enhance their effectiveness: *specialties*. When a character has a rating of 4 or higher in a given Trait, the player can select a specialty for the Trait in question. On rolls that determine the success of an activity related to that Trait specialty, the player counts every 10 rolled as *two* successes, not just one.

As an example, let's say that Spider Chase, a Verbena flow-artist, has Athletics 4. She's especially good at spinning fiery gear, so her player selects Fire-Spinning as a specialty. During a show, Spider executes a double-handed spinning toss with two flaming staves. The player, Inky, rolls Spider's Dexterity (three dots) + Athletics (four dots), for a total of seven dice. Four of Inky's dice come up as successes, but two of the four successes are 10s. Spider, then, has six successes, thanks to her specialty. The staves spin high into the air; Spider pauses, cocks her head, makes a "Come *on...*" gesture to her audience, and raises her hands just in time to perfectly catch both flaming staves and continue her dance. The crowd, as they say, goes wild.

The various Traits below have a number of suggested specialties. You can invent new specialty along the lines of the suggested ones, so long as the Storyteller approves that new specialty. Original specialties should not be too broad (*Keyboards* for a Computer specialty) or potentially abused (*Inflicting Damage* as a Strength specialty). And even if you don't start off with 4 dots or more in a given Trait, you can still choose a specialty for it; certain Traits – like Crafts – actually *require* you to choose a particular specialty. That specialty won't grant the additional-success bonus until you reach a rating of 4, but it can flesh out your character by showing areas of expertise that will eventually help your mage excel in future tasks.

Charisma

Rooted in the Greek word for grace and favor, Charisma reflects the indefinable *it* that makes some folks stand out in a crowd. Game-wise, this Trait measures your presence and appeal. You might not be *pretty* if you have a high Charisma, but by all the gods, people *notice* you!

- • Poor: Faint flower on bland wallpaper.
- •• Average: You seem likeable enough.
- ••• Good: Folks feel drawn to you.
- •••• Exceptional: Shiny!
- ••••• Outstanding: Your mere presence inspires trust, lust, and devotion.

Suggested Specialties: Charming, Sexy, Bold, Inspirational, Sophisticated, Regal

Manipulation

Life's filled with players and pawns. A high-Manipulation character knows how to work her end of that spectrum for maximum effect. Whereas Charisma measures presence and Appearance reflects looks, Manipulation describes social cunning and innate psychology. We manipulate each other all the time, but no one likes to actually *see* the strings attached. As a result, a blown roll with this Trait can be disastrous.

- • Poor: No one buys your bullshit.
- •• Average: Folks tend to trust what you tell them.
- ••• Good: You're a smooth operator when you want to be.
- •••• Exceptional: When you speak, folks listen.
- ••••• Outstanding: "Dance, my puppets – *dance!*"

Suggested Specialties: Guile, Charm, Eloquence, Emotional Appeals, True Believer

Appearance

Never underestimate the power of a pretty face! This Trait captures the appeal of sheer physical beauty... or the painful lack of it. Appearances can be deceiving, of course, especially among mages. Still, we're hard-wired to respond well to a cute butt or a captivating grin.

- • Poor: "Ew."
- •• Average: "You're okay."
- ••• Good: "Are you a model?"
- •••• Exceptional: "Here's my number."
- ••••• Outstanding: "Make me your love-slave!"

Suggested Specialties: Cute, Hawt, Captivating, Roguish, Adorable, Classic Hollywood Beauty

Mental

A mage *thinks*, therefore she *is*. Essential elements of any mage's Path, the following Traits reflect your character's ability to focus, process, and react quickly to mental stimulation.

Perception

Magick demands clarity, so a high-Perception mage excels. This Trait measures your attention to detail, spatial awareness, sensual acuity, and that indefinable instinct that picks up the cues your conscious mind has not yet noticed. A reflection of intuition and awareness, the Perception Trait reveals *clues* more than it analyzes *causes*; that scent of roses nearby might be a rosebush, perfume, or a love spell's lingering Resonance – Perception alone won't tell you which one it is.

- • Poor: "Huh? What...?"
- •• Average: A typical eye for obvious things.
- ••• Good: Unusually sensitive to the world nearby.
- •••• Exceptional: A keen sense of your surroundings.
- ••••• Outstanding: More animal than man.

Suggested Specialties: Uncanny Insight, Astute, Intuitive, Sharp Senses, Hawkeye

Intelligence

Perhaps the most vital tool a mage can possess, this Trait reflects your ability to process information, retain impressions, envision possibilities, and think not merely *outside* the box but perhaps without a box at all. A low-Intelligence character might not be exactly *stupid*, but she's blind to the complexities of life; one with a high Intelligence score, on the other hand, can wrap his head around sophisticated concepts and slippery facts. Despite preconceptions, you don't need schooling to be smart. Still, it takes brains to tackle advanced education and study, so characters with such backgrounds ought to have a respectable Intelligence.

- • Poor: A birthday candle in a halogen world.
- •• Average: A member of the majority.
- ••• Good: Smart enough to hang at the big-kids' table.
- •••• Exceptional: Utterly Brilliant.
- ••••• Outstanding: The dazzling intellect of a born genius.

Suggested Specialties: Book-Learning, Deep Thoughts, Bright, Creative, Keen-Edged Mind

Wits

Even the deepest minds can be oblivious to change. Survival, however, often demands sharp wits. A reflection of mental reflexes, this Trait determines your ability to react to sudden perils, subtle cues, and the twisted logic that often fills a mage's world. Combat ***Initiative*** **(see Chapter Nine, p. 399)** depends upon a character's Wits; without them, a great thinker might soon become dead meat.

- • Poor: Muddled and scatter-brained.
- •• Average: A master of the obvious.
- ••• Good: Ms./ Mr. Multi-task.
- •••• Exceptional: So quick on the uptake that you take other folks down.
- ••••• Outstanding: A mental Shiva or Kali.

Suggested Specialties: Combat Reflexes, Street Survivor, Cunning, Feral, Fox-Witted

Core Abilities

Awakened folks command a wide array of Talents, Skills, and Knowledges. Although certain Traits, called *core Abilities*, are common among mages – and are therefore listed on the character sheet – a wide range of specialized *secondary Abilities* can be found after this section. The following innate knacks, learned proficiencies, and intellectual pursuits are essentially defaults in the modern mage's world; you won't have them *all*, but most characters are at least familiar with the majority of these Traits.

Talents

Inborn affinities refined by practice, Talents reveal a character's natural tendencies and life-honed gifts.

Alertness

You sense things coming long before anyone else does. A combination of keen instincts and sharp thinking, this Ability helps you size up situations and respond accordingly. Beast-folk, survivors, bright courtiers and battle-honed veterans have high Alertness ratings.

- • Novice: "I've got a bad feeling about this..."
- •• Practiced: Your hackles rise at the first sign of trouble.
- ••• Skillful: You catch the threat beneath a whispered voice.
- •••• Expert: You've already noted three attackers and mapped four avenues of escape.
- ••••• Master: Those ninjas might as well be wearing pink neon clown suits.

Possessed By: Spies, Bodyguards, Feral Kids, Street Survivors, Shapeshifters, War Veterans

Suggested Specialties: Ambushes, Instincts, Omens, Urban Wastelands, Combat Zones, Covert Pursuit, Warning Signs

Art

Also known as *Artistic Expression*, this Talent reflects your ability with a visual or performing art: drawing, singing, acting, writing, painting, dance, sculpture, and so forth. Given such talents, you can work within your chosen medium to produce works of startling power. Depending on your idiom, you might create realistic renderings, engaging exaggerations, or wildly avant-garde experimental art. Higher levels reflect your ability to impress your audience; in art, that means striking a chord of Truth in people even when your work isn't remotely realistic.

As with other related general Abilities, each specialty reflects a different medium or field, of artistic endeavor. Each type of art – dance, painting, etc. – must be purchased as a separate specialty. However, because the principles of art are related even when the techniques differ, you can purchase additional specialties for only four points, assuming you have at least four dots in Art and one specialty already in place. See ***The Well-Skilled Craftsman*** **(p. 279)** for further details.

- • Novice: You're creative but unskilled.
- •• Practiced: You've put some time and work into your chosen medium.
- ••• Skillful: Professional art could be a viable career option.
- •••• Expert: You're a working pro whose work displays fascinating appeal and skill.
- ••••• Master: You're an acknowledged master of your field.

Optional Rule: Minimum Abilities

If you focus powerful magick through a specific Ability, as detailed in **Chapter Ten**'s section ***Focus and the Arts***, then it's a good idea to be extremely skilled with that Ability. As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller may insist that a character needs to have at least one dot in the focus-based Ability for every dot he has in the Sphere Rank of an Effect focused through that Ability. If, for example, Autumn uses artwork (and thus, the Art Talent) as a focus instrument, then she needs to have at least one dot in Art for every dot she has in the Spheres she uses artwork to focus. In short, she can't use artwork to focus a Forces 3/ Prime 2 Effect unless she has at least three dots in Art.

This option demands a certain "minimum competency level" on focus-related Abilities. It may also become too cumbersome and/ or complicated to employ in every situation. Even so, we *do* suggest using this rule for certain Abilities – Computer, Do, Hypertech, Martial Arts, Science, and Technology – that are vital elements of a mage's practice. An unskilled martial artist, after all, shouldn't be able to use devastating magickal techniques as extensions of his skill.

Possessed By: Art Students, Fine Artists, Professional Artists, Talented Kids, Dedicated Hobbyists, Reclusive Geniuses, Meditative Ascetics, Mages Who Focus Magick Through Art

Suggested Specialties: Painting, Video, Singing, Acting, Dance, Mixed Media, CGI, Model-Making, Classical Art, Avant-Garde, Unrefined Intuition, Mad Brilliance, Uncanny Truths, Primitive Techniques, specific musical instruments (Guitar, Drums, Piano, etc.)

Athletics

Fitness is your passion. While other folks sit on the sidelines, you're running races, scoring touchdowns, biking to and from work, and developing prowess with intense practice. Folks don't usually picture wizards hanging around the gym, but you're an exception to that stereotype. "A sound mind in a sound body" is your motto. What good is it to be a master of reality, after all, if your reality involves a fat ass and flabby gut?

Like Art, Athletics has many different specialties – running, climbing, swimming, and so forth. And like Art, Crafts, and other broad categories, you can buy specialties to reflect different athletic pursuits. (The ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option applies here as well.)

- • Novice: You were pretty decent in PE class.
- •• Practiced: Regular exercise is essential to your life.
- ••• Skillful: You are one fit sonofabitch!
- •••• Expert: Gym-rats and pro athletes take notes from you.
- ••••• Master: You could qualify for the Olympics... and you might actually compete!

Possessed By: Jocks, Cyborgs, Fitness Gurus, Personal Trainers, Professional Dancers, Martial Artists, Underwear Models, TV Stars

Suggested Specialties: Bodybuilding, Cycling, Climbing, Equestrian, Swimming, Survival Training, Extreme Endurance, Flow-Arts, Parkour, Skiing, specific sports (Football, Basketball, Hockey, etc.)

Awareness

You've got uncanny perceptions. While alert folks spot everyday clues, your instincts cue in on the so-called supernatural side of life. Perhaps you've simply got that feeling about things – some people do, even if they're not Awakened as such. More likely, you've spent enough time around the magical world to sense its effects in your presence.

At lower levels, this Talent grants a nebulous perception of uncanny phenomena; higher ratings in the Trait reveal auras, expose the secretive Night-Folk, and open your eyes to the spiritual Periphery. In game terms, you can use Perception + Awareness to spot paranormal effects, detect magick, recognize Resonance Echoes, and so forth, assuming they're within close proximity of you. The more successes you roll, the more detailed your impressions become.

For a reference chart of aura colors and textures, see **Chapter Ten,** (p.507).

- • Novice: You possess a gift for spotting hidden truths.
- •• Practiced: Magic exists, and you often sense its presence.
- ••• Skillful: You can see auras, and you understand what those colors mean.
- •••• Expert: The supernatural world reveals itself to you in disturbing detail.
- ••••• Master: You're so attuned to the mystic realm that many folks consider you insane.

Possessed By: Canny Grannies, Wise Spies, Crazy Shamans, Demented Seers, Insightful Kids, Mad Scientists, Those Touched By God

Suggested Specialties: Omens, Auras, Resonance, Weird Feelings, Mystic Instincts, Hidden Magic, Spiritual Vidare

Brawl

You kick ass. Maybe you grew up hard and mean, or maybe you're schooled in basic self-defense. Either way, your fists and feet are weapons – probably not deadly, but a lot more effective than random swings from unskilled brutes. Not only do you know *how* to fight, but you're naturally *good* at it. You've got the skill, will, and training to hurt someone using nothing more than human cunning and animal ferocity.

(For armed fighting, see the ***Melee*** Skill, and for refined unarmed techniques, see the ***Martial Arts*** Skill. Both appear below.)

Optional Rule: Professional Skills and Expert Knowledges

Human beings master many skills. No list, no matter how expansive, could hope to cover them all. Thus, you could incorporate the *optional rule* of *Professional Skills and Expert Knowledges*: broad categories of Abilities that aren't covered by other Traits in this section.

As their names suggest, the Professional Skills category includes disciplines refined through study and practice, whereas Expert Knowledges comprise fields of learning honed by experience. Such Skills range from physical disciplines like Cooking and Gambling to mental refinements like Camouflage or Weaponry. Knowledges, in turn, concentrate upon intellectual pursuits with practical applications: Bribery, Power-Brokering, Journalism, and so forth. Many of the secondary Abilities described in various World of Darkness sourcebooks can be summed up as either a Professional Skill or an Expert Knowledge.

(The **20th Anniversary Editions** of **Vampire** and **Werewolf** feature a third optional category, *Hobby Talent*, to cover innate abilities refined by practice. You can use this category too, although many of the Abilities described in those rulebooks – Carousing, Fortune-Telling, and so forth – are more than just hobbies to folks who practice the Awakened Arts and Sciences.)

As with Art, Crafts, Esoterica and so on, each Professional or Expert Ability must be purchased separately; the Professional Skill: Cooking does not teach your character how to gamble. If your group uses the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman option*** **(see the sidebar of that name, on p. 279)**, then that rule applies to these catch-all Skills and Knowledges as well.

- • Novice/ Dabbler: You've read a few books or taken a class or two.
- •• Practiced/ Student: You've studied at a college or vocational school.
- ••• Skillful/ Scholar: Book-learning, combined with practical application, gives you a decent grounding in this field.
- •••• Expert/ Professor: You're good enough to teach other students – perhaps even other professionals – what you know.
- ••••• Master: Other experts come to you for guidance.

Possessed By: Anyone with practical study and experience with the trade

Suggested Skills: Climbing, Escapology, Fast-Draw, specific skill-sets (Gambling, Cooking, Escapology, etc.)

Suggested Knowledges: Alternative History, Bribery, Government, Propaganda, Spycraft, Subcultures, Terrorism, Theology, Vice

- • Novice: You had a tough childhood.
- •• Practiced: You're from The Bad Part of Town.
- ••• Skillful: When punches fly, you're among the last folks standing.
- •••• Expert: Extreme fighting champs shiver when you enter the ring.
- ••••• Master: "See me hit you, you go down."

Possessed By: Bikers, Brawlers, Bullies, Former Punching Bags, Bodyguards, Military Veterans, Scary Folks With Bad Tempers

Suggested Specialties: Barroom, Boxing, Beast-Form Fighting, Dirty Fighting, Disarming, Peaceful Warrior

Empathy

An innate sense of emotional energies, this Talent provides you with insight – perhaps more insight than you might want – into how the people around you feel. Ideally, this helps you understand them better and perhaps allows you to calm, rouse, or otherwise adjust their emotional state. On the flipside, it might leave you vulnerable to their passions (a common fault among Ecstatic mages), or it could leave them vulnerable to your machinations. Combined with Mind-based Effects, Empathy can be a potent tool – or weapon – in the hands of an Awakened character. For details, see ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects*** in **Chapter Ten,** **(pp. 532-535)**.

- • Novice: You're pretty decent at noticing emotional cues.
- •• Practiced: You're the crying shoulder for your friends.
- ••• Skillful: It's fairly hard to deceive you.
- •••• Expert: Even below the surface, a person's true feelings seem obvious to you.
- ••••• Master: To your eyes, most people are open books.

Possessed By: Ecstatic Mages, Shamans, Healers, Seducers, Sales Reps, Therapists, Trusted Friends, Nephandi

Suggested Specialties: Hidden Feelings, Subtle Cues, Emotional Manipulation, Trust, Sensing Emotions, Life-Force Fluctuations, Interpersonal Psychology, Seeing Past the Mask, "I Know What You Need"

Expression

Life is your canvas, and you excel at making impressions upon it. Through theatrical flair and audience psychology, you can rouse emotions, shift opinions, and grab the spotlight in social situations. Although this Trait can be used to handle any social situation, it's best used to make general impressions. For specific artistic endeavors, see ***Art***, above.

- • Novice: When you speak, folks notice.
- •• Practiced: Your passions capture other people's interest.
- ••• Skillful: You rock the crowd with a voice that's loud.
- •••• Expert: In this media-glutted world, you still blaze bright.
- ••••• Master: Poets, prophets, and politicians wish they were you.

Possessed By: Rock Stars, Media Pundits, Ecstatic Mages, Executives, Poets, Leaders, Politicians, Bloggers, Rabble-Rousers, Hip-Hop MCs, Professional Celebrities

Suggested Specialties: Passion Plays, Poetic Eloquence, Motivational Speaking, Tactical Rhetoric, Preaching, Command, Shut-Downs, Rocking the Mic

Intimidation

You scare people – perhaps not through overt threats (although, of course, that works too), but by the simple virtue of your presence. When you choose to, you can dominate most situations. Maybe you understand the unconscious cues of social alpha-ism or have a way with cutting words. Or perhaps you're simply big enough, mean enough or *don't-give-a-fuck* enough to inspire submission. Whatever your secret might be, this Talent gives you an edge when staring down other people, beasts, and possibly other entities as well.

- • Novice: Playground terror.
- •• Practiced: Clique leader.
- ••• Skillful: Professional dominant.
- •••• Expert: Alpha wolf.
- ••••• Master: Queen or king of all you survey.

Possessed By: Men in Black, Cyborgs, Cops, Witches, Mad Scientists, Outlaws, Bullies, Beast-Folk, Pro Doms, Drill Sergeants, Samuel L. Jackson

Suggested Specialties: Bad Cop, BDSM, Pack Hierarchy, Cold Stare, Brutal Threats, Topping From Below, Pants-Crapping Terror

Leadership

A more refined sort of control, this Talent helps you inspire other folks to follow your lead. It might involve commanding presence, assertive words, clear determination, or simply the Right Stuff when said stuff is needed. When you bark, folks hop – not always with compliance, but with, at the very least, a grudging admission that you seem to know what you're doing... even when you don't.

Optional Rule: The Well-Skilled Craftsman

Mages excel at many different fields of endeavor and focus their Arts through quite a few of them. As a result, rather than present a ton of related but separate Abilities, the Well-Skilled Craftsman option allows your character to master a wide range of similar skills.

This *optional rule* lets you purchase specific specialties that reflect certain skill sets within a related Ability. Rather than buying the Ability several times over, you simply define a single specialty as your primary concentration within that Ability. Even if you have only one dot in your Ability, choose a specialty to reflect your character's preferred field. Then, when you reach four dots, you can buy additional specialties for just four experience points per specialty. This way, a skillful practitioner can quickly expand his expertise.

For example, let's say that Spider Chase has Crafts, with a specialty in Leatherwork. When she reaches Crafts 4, she can purchase additional Crafts specialties (we'll say Tailoring and Vehicle Repair) for only four experience points per specialty, or eight points total for those two. Of course, the character has to learn those skills in the course of the story – she can't just wake up knowing how to repair cars! But assuming that Spider has the chance to broaden her repertoire, she can become a Well-Skilled Craftsman by building upon the principles she already understands.

This option also applies to the Art and Athletics Talents; the Firearms, Martial Arts, and Melee Skills; and the Academics, Esoterica, Lore, Politics, and Science Knowledge Abilities, because each one represents a related field of very different skills. ***Hobby Talent*** and ***Professional and Expert Abilities*** **(see p.277)** expand this option too - see those entries for details.

- • Novice: Head cheerleader.
- •• Practiced: Quarterback.
- ••• Skillful: Executive.
- •••• Expert: Tycoon.
- ••••• Master: Nick Fury.

Possessed By: Officers, Managers, Pundits, Preachers, Teachers, Team Leaders, Cult Leaders, Gang Leaders, Politicians

Suggested Specialties: Competent, Inspiring, Regal, Harsh, Do-Or-Die, Soft-Voiced Command

Streetwise

The underworld is your home, and you know it pretty well. Folks who normally *don't talk to no one* will open up to you. Probably raised in or around the streets, you understand the codes and cues outside the law. In addition to some minor tricks of the trade (jimmying locks, fencing goods, swiping stuff when no one's looking), you know how to move and speak and otherwise fit in where cops and angels fear to tread.

- • Novice: Rock musician.
- •• Practiced: Suburban dope dealer.
- ••• Skillful: Hip-Hop MC.
- •••• Expert: Gang leader.
- ••••• Master: Gang lord.

Possessed By: Bartenders, Hookers, Hackers, Pimps, Street People, Cops, Detectives, Street Ministers, Musicians, Runaways, Drug Dealers, Activists, Journalists, Taxi Drivers

Suggested Specialties: Theft, Survival Skills, Outlaw Hacker Culture, Crash Space, Street Politics, Urban Tribes, Trust, Hiding Spots, Sex Trade, Drug Trade, Music Culture, Gangs, Seeing Nothing Yet Everything

Subterfuge

You're good at winning people's trust and then turning it to your advantage – and also good at spotting folks who try to do the same thing to you. (This second element, incidentally, replaces the old Ability *Sense Deception*.) Perhaps you use your powers for good... but probably not. A trade secret for sneaks, gossips, grifters, and frauds, this Talent helps you get around social barriers, figure out what people want, and then appeal to their desires. It doesn't have to involve outright *lying*, but let's just say you're really good at lawyering the truth.

- • Novice: Cute kid.
- •• Practiced: Small-time hustler.
- ••• Skillful: Successful lawyer.
- •••• Expert: Career politician.
- ••••• Master: Master spy.

Possessed By: Syndicate Agents, Secret Agents, Home-Wreckers, Ad Agency Personnel, Lobbyists, Crooks, Shapeshifters, Infiltrators, Embezzlers, Hustlers, Attorneys, Sociopaths

Suggested Specialties: Con Games, Sexual Manipulation, False Innocence, Politics, Law, Cheating, Undermining Opposition, Sensing Deceptions

Skills

Whereas Talents reflect innate affinities, Skills represent things you've learned to do. You're probably good at such things to start with, but the techniques involved in the following skill sets demand a bit more study and practice than does raw ability.

Crafts

You know how to create and repair things with your hands. Pursuing a particular trade (and perhaps a number of other ones too), you've begun to master the techniques involved in

carpentry, mechanics, leatherwork, metallurgy, or any other handicraft you could name.

When purchasing this Skill, you must define a specialty for your character even if you don't have the usual four dots in the Trait; this specialty defines a type of Craft you pursue, and you get the bonus once you achieve at least four dots in that field. If you want your character to have *several* Crafts, they should be purchased separately. A mechanic who's also good with ceramics, woodworking, and home repair, for example, would have several different Craft specialties to reflect her ability with each one.

- • Novice: You sorta know what you're doing.
- •• Practiced: Basic skills have given way to working knowledge.
- ••• Skillful: You're pretty damn good, if you must say so yourself!
- •••• Expert: You're highly respected within your field.
- ••••• Master: There's little you can't do when you set your mind to doing it.

Possessed By: Inventors, Mechanics, Artisans, Bohemians, Servants, Recreationists, Technicians, Wanderers, Survivalists, Mad Scientists, Obsessed Superheroes

Suggested Specialties: Armor, Weaponsmith, Carpentry, Invention, Tailoring, Design, Vehicle Repair, Home Repair, Leatherwork, High-Tech Tinkering

Drive

Cars? You *know* cars. Maybe trucks too, if you're good enough. This Skill reflects the everyday complexities of automobile handling: the higher your rating, the better you are behind the wheel. A single dot represents basic operation of an automatic transmission car. Higher levels open up a wider range of vehicles at your command. Typical driving doesn't demand a roll, but if you find yourself in a race, a chase, or some other challenging circumstance, you'd best hope that you have a few dots in this Skill. The results otherwise could be... messy.

For game rules that deal with driving and so forth, see ***Vehicle Systems*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 458-462)**.

- • Novice: Sunday driver.
- •• Practiced: Typical American.
- ••• Skillful: New York taxi driver.
- •••• Expert: Professional racer.
- ••••• Master: Bond – James Bond.

Possessed By: Chauffeurs, Instructors, Truckers, Daredevils, Delivery Drivers, Secret Agents, Getaway Specialists, Stunt Artists

Suggested Specialties: Racing, Pursuit, Shadowing, Stunts, Vintage Cars, Heavy Trucks, Long-Distance, Shaking Tails, Bad Conditions, Snow and Ice, Off-Road, Showing Off

Etiquette

Social graces are your forté. Through a blend of cultured manners and people skills, you know how to make a good impression. Given the elaborate gamesmanship and baroque expectations found at certain levels of society (and the local customs of cultures other than your own), this can grant an extremely valuable edge in negotiations, seductions, and other forms of diplomacy. And because social rules often exclude everyone except "the right sort of people," this Skill provides a passkey to many important engagements.

- • Novice: You can attend fine restaurants without embarrassing yourself.
- •• Practiced: You've got impressive manners and a sense for saying the right things.
- ••• Skillful: Wonderfully cultured, you know your way around a meal, party, or conversation.
- •••• Expert: A social chameleon, you put folks at ease almost anywhere.
- ••••• Master: You're a valued guest in nearly any situation.

Possessed By: Diplomats, Emissaries, Negotiators, Nobility, Executives, World Travelers, Social Climbers, Old-Money Heirs, Spies

Suggested Specialties: High Society, Royalty, Dining, Subcultures, International Travel, Umbral Courts, Master Mages, Internet Culture, Digital Web, Technocratic Politesse

Firearms

Guns are your thing. You might not be an expert marksman, but you're at least familiar with the basics of shooting, cleaning, and maintaining firearms. A character with at least two dots in Firearms knows her way around a range, ammunition types, and the pros and cons of various makes and models.

Because your average shooting range doesn't carry plasma cannons, this Skill doesn't cover energy-projector weapons. (For those chops, see ***Energy Weapons*** in the ***Secondary Skills*** section, below.) With the proper training and experience, however, specialties for the Firearms Skill can cover heavy weapons: machine guns, bazookas, rocket launchers, and so on; see ***The Well-Skilled Craftsman***, above.

- • Novice: Gun range newbie.
- •• Practiced: Hunter.
- ••• Skillful: Typical cop or soldier.
- •••• Expert: Sharpshooter.
- ••••• Master: Frank Castle.

Possessed By: Assassins, Survivalists, Washed-Up Rock Stars, Police, Military Personnel, Enforcers, Bodyguards, Militia Members, Gang Members, Black Suits, Self-Defense Enthusiasts, Pissed-Off Crazy People

Suggested Specialties: Sniper, Quick-Draw, Target Shooting, Rifles, Handguns, Drive-Bys, Military Hardware, Heavy Weapons, Vintage Firearms, Cybernetic Weaponry

Martial Arts

The many refinements of hand-to-hand combat have produced thousands of martial art styles, from brutal Greek pankration to sublime t'ai chi. You pursue one or more of these disciplines, so your fighting techniques are more effective than simple punches and kicks.

Do and Other Martial Arts

Because of its extraordinary disciplines and refinements, the Akashic Art of Do is not considered a normal martial art. Characters who practice Do *must* have the Do Talent instead of or in addition to the Martial Arts Skill. The same character could have *both* Abilities, having studied a lesser martial art before embarking upon the arduous path of Do. If she chooses to pursue Do, however, she *may not* buy any further dots in Martial Arts, as such devotion demands total commitment, without the distractions of lesser practices. For more details, see the entries for ***Do*** and ***Martial Arts*** in the ***Combat*** section of **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 423-430)**.

In game terms, the Martial Arts Skill reflects hard-won expertise in some combat form. Because of the intense training, specific techniques, and discipline involved, this Skill must be learned through practice and taught by a teacher who's skilled in the same martial arts form you pursue. A savate teacher, after all, can't teach you drunken-monkey kung fu.

In return, this Skill grants access to a variety of special combat maneuvers described in the ***Combat*** section of **Chapter Nine**. An accomplished martial artist can also use her practice to focus magickal Effects: powerful strikes, healing techniques, Mind-based powers, and so on. (See the ***Martial Arts*** entries in **Chapter Nine**, pp. 423-426 and **Chapter Ten**, pp. 580-581.) And because martial arts involve scientific applications, and are very much a part of accepted reality, Technocrats often use them too. If it's good enough for Agent Smith, after all, then any good Technocrat can employ such arts!

In real life, most martial artists pursue many different styles. Rather than buy this Skill separately for every different form your character knows, you may choose the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option to reflect a different style of combat. Someone with lots of dots and specialties also has lots of options when it comes to kicking ass.

As suggested above under the ***Optional Rule: Minimum Abilities***, a mage who uses martial arts as the practice and/ or instrument of her magickal focus should have at least one dot in Martial Arts for every dot she has in the highest Sphere she uses for martial arts-based Effects. Otherwise, the Effect-Ranks she can focus through her martial arts are limited to the dots she has in this Ability; a mage with Martial Arts 1, therefore, could not focus Rank 2-5 Effects through her martial arts. As noted earlier, **Chapter Ten** contains details about focus, Sphere Ranks, and Effects.

- • Novice: Raw beginner.
- •• Practiced: Experienced student.
- ••• Skillful: Devotee.
- •••• Expert: Accomplished combatant.
- ••••• Master: Formidable master.

Possessed By: Cops, Soldiers, Gang Members, Old Masters, Black Suits, Self-Defense Advocates, Athletes, Stunt Artists, The Most Unlikely People

Suggested Specialties: Soft Style (snake, monkey, drunken style, etc.), Hard Style (tiger, mantis, etc.), Aikido, Judo, Karate, Muay Thai, Kuei Lung Chuan, etc.

Meditation

Ground, center, breathe, and relax. This Skill helps you sweep aside the clutter of everyday existence and find a spot within yourself that offers calm. Depending on your preferred style, your background, and the purpose for which you practice meditation, this could involve simple quiet time, elaborate postures and breath control, religious devotion, and even ecstatic dance or prayer.

In game terms, the Meditation Skill can help your character make up for lost sleep, hibernate, gain artistic or mystical insights, unravel patterns or enigmas, or refresh your Quintessence rating (see the ***Avatar*** and ***Quintessence*** Trait entries later in this chapter).

A character with Meditation often has at least one dot in the ***Esoterica*** Knowledge Trait. Many forms of magick, or feats like astral travel, also use meditation as an instrument of focus – see **Chapter Ten, (pp. 594-596)**, for details.

- • Novice: You can ground and center for short periods of time.
- •• Practiced: Regular practice has deepened and extended your abilities.
- ••• Skillful: Even under distracting conditions, you know how to find your center.
- •••• Expert: "Use the Force, Luke..."
- ••••• Master: An island of calm is yours whenever you want or need it.

Possessed By: Akashics, Yogis, Monks, Hypnotists, Therapists, Clergy, Martial Artists, Hippies

Suggested Specialties: Zen, Yoga, Do, Trance, Nodes, Relaxation, Therapy, Tantra, T'ai Chi, Virtual Reality, Focus, Meditative Movement, Grace Under Pressure

Melee

Weapons are extensions of your own limbs, and you know how to use them with brutal efficiency. When fists and feet just aren't enough to get the job done, this Skill literally gives you the fighting edge... or the blunt instrument, if need be. Melee grants your character a working knowledge of weaponry and its practical effects in combat. Certain groups, like gangs or martial arts fellowships, prize skill at arms; if you wanna hang with such people, this Trait is essential to your credibility... and perhaps your survival, too.

Certain weapon maneuvers (again, see ***Combat*** in **Chapter Nine**) may be used only with certain weapons or with weapons-

based martial arts. As with other fighting skills, the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option may apply.

- • Novice: You can swing a club or blade around without hurting yourself... much.
- •• Practiced: You've earned a bit of skill... maybe even enough for a real-life fight.
- ••• Skillful: You're kinda badass.
- •••• Expert: You're seriously badass.
- ••••• Master: Your skill intimidates the pros.

Possessed By: Cops, Military Personnel, Spies, Killers, Outlaws, Martial Artists, Street Folks, Barroom Brawlers, SCA Members

Suggested Specialties: Blades, Polearms, Staves, Stunts, Combat Sports, Weapons of Opportunity, Kendo, Fencing, Martial Arts Weapons

Research

It ain't glamorous, but if you're a mage, you need to learn how to track things down. This Skill helps you locate sources of information – public libraries, private archives, Internet searches, occult collections, verbal lore, and so forth – and then skim them for the information you seek. You might not find exactly what you're looking for; some things can be found *only* in special places. Still, a successful Research roll can help you get on the right track, even if specific facts remain elusive... at least for now.

- • Novice: Buffy.
- •• Practiced: Anya.
- ••• Skillful: Willow.
- •••• Expert: Giles.
- ••••• Master: Fred.

Possessed By: Monster Hunters, Research Assistants, Archive Keepers, Librarians, Detectives, Writers, Journalists, Scientists

Suggested Specialties: Arcane Collections, Forbidden Lore, Hidden Sources, Secrets, Net Searches, Oral Traditions, specific topics (Crime, Medicine, Politics, History, etc.)

Stealth

A vital proficiency for folks who want or need to get around without being noticed, this Skill helps you move in silence, take advantage of your environment, and spot potential hazards before they blow your cover. Other characters have a chance to notice you, of course **(see Chapter Nine, p. 403)**, but a high rating in this Skill can beat most mundane forms of observation.

- • Novice: With dark clothes, you might not be spotted at night.
- •• Practiced: You often sneak out past your parents.
- ••• Skillful: A genuine sneak, you elude casual detection.
- •••• Expert: Just doin' what a ninja's gotta do...
- ••••• Master: Batman's taking notes.

Possessed By: Spies, Burglars, Runaways, Star-Crossed Lovers, Hunters, Assassins, Vigilantes

Suggested Specialties: Blending Into Shadows, Woodlands, Alleys, Concealment, Squeaky Floors, Moving Silently, Shadowing a Target

Survival

In the modern consumer age, most folks have forgotten how to survive without a store close by. Not you, though. A combination of learned knowledge and animal instinct helps you locate sources of food, water, shelter, and relative safety. You can probably find your way through the wilderness or urban wastelands, puzzling out the local hazards long enough to keep you alive... at least for now.

Very basic survival skills apply to almost any environment; advanced tasks, however – or extremely harsh or alien environments – demand specific Survival specialties. A bit of backpacking experience, for example, won't help you much in Death Valley or downtown Mumbai. A variant on this Skill, **Urban Survival**, gives you the expertise to live off the streets, dive Dumpsters, and figure out where – and where *not* – to grab a nap in the cities and suburbs of this World of Darkness.

For rules about survival situations, see ***Environmental Hazards*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 435-436)**.

- • Novice: You've done some day-hikes on established trails.
- •• Practiced: Plenty of time outdoors has taught you decent skills.
- ••• Skillful: You can live off the land, make traps, and spot most obvious hazards.
- •••• Expert: You'd probably survive the Hunger Games.
- ••••• Master: The wilderness is your full-time home.

Possessed By: Hunters, Hikers, Shamans, Survivalists, Fugitives, Reality TV Contestants, Rural Folk, Rangers, Members of Indigenous Cultures

Suggested Specialties: Old-School Wisdom, Traps, Shelters, Weather Hazards, End-Times Preparedness, specific environments (Desert, Jungle, Woodlands, Suburbs, etc.)

Technology

In our high-tech world, this Skill often comes in handy. A catch-all group of familiar tech affinities, Technology reflects a working knowledge of typical developed-world gadgets. Most urbanized characters have at least one dot in Technology but seldom more than three. This Ability covers simple operations and repairs; for advanced forms of technology and hypertech, see ***Crafts*** above, or ***Computers*** and ***Secondary Skills*** below. For game systems that deal with mundane tech, see ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 463-464)**.

- • Novice: Normal household technology is a snap for you.
- •• Practiced: Basic household, IT, and automotive maintenance and repairs are easy enough to manage, and you know how to tinker around with simple electronic tech.
- ••• Skillful: You've got enough mechanics savvy to create your own minor-league tech, repair most everyday items, and work simple technomagick with the goods at your command.
- •••• Expert: You're a whiz with typical technology, invent some pretty advanced stuff, and whip up impressive gadgets outside the range of everyday Sleepertech.
- ••••• Master: A technological artisan, you can design, construct, operate, and repair unique devices and astonishing inventions. If you employ technomagick, then your creations surpass Sleepertech by a pretty wide margin.

Possessed By: Technicians, Inventors, Repair Specialists, Technomancers

Suggested Specialties: Electronics, Vehicles, Modification, Invention, Media Tech, Technomagick

Knowledges

Certain Abilities demand learning. Taught through a combination of schooling and experience, these Traits reflect things that your character understands on an intellectual and perhaps intuitive level. Although some of them, like Computer or Medicine, involve physical practice too, they exist mostly in the realm of consciousness only. It's not surprising, then, that mages depend on Knowledge Traits more than many other characters do. In the realm of the Awakened, after all, consciousness is *everything*.

Academics

Despite the failings of the American system, mages cannot afford to be ignorant. Whether they're self-taught, unusually accomplished, or schooled in some system beyond the typical public education found in the U.S., most Awakened folks display an unusual degree of scholastic achievement.

This Knowledge reflects your overall academic understanding – language skills, math, history, and so forth. As with Crafts, you should choose a specialty to reflect your greatest area of expertise. (The ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option applies.) Even outside that specialty, however, your Academics rating reflects your general competence for scholastic subjects. And though every mage ought to have at least one dot in this Trait, many groups (especially Hermetics, Etherites, Solificati, and the various branches of the Technocracy) advocate much higher levels of education and knowledge.

"For scientific fields, see **pp. 288-289**. For languages, see that Merit in Appendix II, **p. 643**.

- • Dabbler: Basic primary and secondary education.
- •• Student: Basic university education, equivalent to a two-year degree.
- ••• Scholar: Advanced university education, equivalent to a four-year degree.
- •••• Professor: Advanced specialized study, plus an advanced university-level education.
- ••••• Master: Refined and advanced scholarship, with highly respected academic achievements.

Possessed By: Students, Scholars, Scientists, Journalists, Authors, Wizards

Suggested Specialties: Teaching, Liberal Arts, specific field of study (History, Language, Folklore, Politics, etc.)

Computer

One of the cornerstones of the world as we know it now, the computer was still a pretty strange device in 1993; by 2013, however, most industrial-world folks under 50 years old (and many people far older than that) knew their way around basic home and office computer systems. Computers are also far easier to use in 2015 than they were in 1993, and so the degree to which your character understands and employs a computer – and the degree to which such understanding is common knowledge – will depend a *lot* on your **Mage** chronicle's timeframe. Basic proficiency with computers is a lot more typical in 2015, after all, than it was in the early '90s!

This Knowledge reflects your understanding of Information Technology; a single dot involves basic computer use (whatever that looks like in your chronicle), whereas higher ratings show a deeper understanding of hardware, software, interface, the Internet, and IT culture in general. Certain tasks (like advanced programming or repair) and systems (especially the arcane tech employed by technomancers) demand *at least* three or four dots in this Trait before your character can even begin to understand them.

As a general rule for mages who employ computers as instruments of focus, assume that *a mage cannot channel a Sphere Effect through a computer unless he has at least as many dots in Computer as he has in that Sphere*. If Max, for example, has only one dot in Computer Knowledge, then he cannot use Sphere Effects of Rank 2 or higher through a computer because he simply doesn't understand computers well enough to do so. For details about Spheres, their Ranks, and their Effects, see **Chapter Ten**.

For expanded game rules related to computer maintenance, hacking, and cracking, see **The Book of Secretss**.

- • Dabbler: You know basic computer skills for your time and place.
- •• Student: You've studied IT systems and can do basic programming.
- ••• Scholar: Study and experience make you pretty decent with essential systems.
- •••• Professor: You're a respected pro in the computer tech field.
- ••••• Master: When you're not making existing systems play fetch for you, you're crafting new stuff, reworking hardware, and being an overall master of your trade.

Possessed By: Virtual Adepts, Technocrats, Technomancers, Students, IT Pros, Hackers, Military Personnel, Almost Anyone in Current Tech Cultures

Suggested Specialties: General Use, Internet, Programming, Repair, IT Culture, Office Tech, Entertainment Tech, CGI, Data Systems, Hacking, Cracking, Organization, Current Market, Underground, Advanced Tech, Cryptanalysis

Cosmology/ Subdimensions

Known by Technocrats and many hypertech mystics as **Subdimensions**, this trait reflects a working knowledge of the puzzling Otherworlds beyond the Earthly plane. With it, you stand a decent chance of finding your way around out there without getting yourself killed. (*Without* it, you're seriously screwed.) The specific way in which you view the Otherworlds will depend a lot on what you expect to see there; this Knowledge simply gives you the tools to navigate paths, spot hazards, deal with entities, and recognize opportunities or threats when you run across them.

For an overview of the Otherworlds, see **Chapter Four**. For game systems, see ***The Otherworlds*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 474-485)**.

- • Dabbler: Student of the mysteries.
- •• Student: Occasional voyager.
- ••• Scholar: Experienced traveler.
- •••• Professor: Seasoned explorer.
- ••••• Master: World-walker.

Possessed By: Shamans, Witches, Hermetics, Void Engineers, Etherites, Werewolves, Astral Travelers, Archmages

Suggested Specialties: Astral Voyaging, Courts, Paths, Hazards, Omens, Realms, Navigation, Dimensional Exploration, Threat Factors, Otherworldly Etiquette

Enigmas

You can wrap your head around concepts that give other people headaches. Puzzles, riddles, artistic themes, uncanny entities, arcane secrets, bizarre methods of communication – you might not understand the *specifics* just yet, but you can hash out enough comprehension to get by. Especially in a mage's world, many things transcend rational explanation... and that realm of strangeness is where the Enigmas Knowledge takes you. Whether you need to make jumps of logic, wade into metaphysical currents, spot clues in apparent chaos, or figure out what's being said *waaaaaaaay* between the lines (or totally *outside* them), this Trait is essential.

- • Dabbler: Puzzles intrigue you.
- •• Student: Zen koans do not piss you off.
- ••• Scholar: "You were not put here to '*Get it*,' Mr. Burton."
- •••• Professor: You clap with one hand inside Schrödinger's box.
- ••••• Master: You *are* an enigma.

Possessed By: Akashics, Ecstatics, Hermetics, Shamans, Mad Scientists, Detectives, Weird-Ass Metaphysicians, Gamers, Sifus, Professors, Crazy Fuckers, Annoying Old Masters

Suggested Specialties: Riddles, Puzzles, Metaphysics, Deduction, Zen, Arcane Enigmas, Codes and Ciphers, Classic Mysteries, Intuitive Leaps, Deciphering Madness

Esoterica

Esoteric knowledge comes in many forms: astrology, angelography, fortune-telling, yoga, herbalism, demonology, the lore of stones, even the secret code languages of occult societies. For centuries, such mysteries were the province of selected initiates; these days, it's relatively easy to find the basics in any decent bookstore or website. Even so, the deeper levels remain obscure to all but the most devoted students of the art. Anyone can take a yoga class in the modern world, but the more arcane applications of that art demand years of practice, study, and devotion.

Game-wise, the Esoterica Knowledge reflects your pursuit of esoteric disciplines and, by extension, provides instruments for your magickal focus. The Trait's overall rating reflects your general knowledge of arcane subjects, whereas each specialty reflects your expertise within a certain field. Unlike the ***Occult*** Knowledge – which in **Mage 20** reflects an understanding of "secret history" and shadow-cultures – Esoterica represents the *practical* application of unusual fields. Occult can teach your character who Aleister Crowley *was*, while Esoterica helps her understand what Crowley *did*... and to use those principles herself. In short, this Knowledge sums up a lot of previous editions' Abilities into a single united Trait.

Because esoteric disciplines are often interrelated, you can use the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option to purchase a new specialty for only four experience points, assuming that you already have at least four dots in the Esoterica Knowledge, an existing specialty, and a story-based reason to learn that discipline. Say, for example, your character has four dots in Esoterica, with a specialty in Herbalism; if he gets some time to study yoga, he can spend four experience points and then add a specialty in Yoga to that Knowledge... after which time he can use yoga as a focus tool (assuming that it fits his magickal paradigm), and count 10s as *two* successes on mundane or magick-casting rolls that employ that practice.

Given an opportunity to study and practice an art, *any* character can learn Esoterica. Although such disciplines don't give magickal powers to unAwakened characters, the Knowledge lets them use mundane applications – teaching yoga classes, doing horoscopes, deciphering alchemical texts and so forth – and count 10s as two successes if and when they do so. Understanding the principles of *bakemono-jutsu* – the ninja "ghost technique" – won't make you invisible, for instance, but a specialty in that esoteric technique would let you count 10s as two successes on your Stealth Skill roll. Even though they can't employ mystic powers, non-mages can be far more knowledgeable about such subjects than mages are. Such mentors may teach a mage this Knowledge or allow him to add another specialty to his existing expertise. Let's say that Dante needs to learn demonology; he goes to the best teacher he can find – an unAwakened monk named Brother Silence – and studies his ass off.

Optional Rule: Body Control

Several esoteric fields – notably yoga, t'ai chi, qigong and other advanced trance-state disciplines – grant a considerable amount of body control to a student of that field. And though casual practitioners rarely achieve such feats, devotees can accomplish apparently superhuman acts. This *optional rule* allows for such feats even without the use of magick.

Assume that a character with an Esoterica specialty in Yoga or Body Control, plus at least the minimum dots in Esoterica, can use the following feats, with only one effect at a time.

Under calm situations, the character must focus for at least two turns, then make an Intelligence + Esoterica roll, difficulty 7; under stress, the devotee must focus for at least two turns, then make a Wits + Esoterica roll, difficulty 8, to achieve a state of bodily control. Again, *these effects are not magickal*. With a bit of Life magick added, however, such control can become truly miraculous.

Note: In the **Revised**-edition Akashic Brotherhood sourcebook, Body Control was a Knowledge Ability. Under this option, however, it has been subsumed into certain specialties within the Esoterica Knowledge.

For any type of character, body control can be a true life-saver during survival situations. For details, see the ***Environmental Hazards*** section in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 435-444)**.

# of Successes	Minimum Dots	Feat
One	One dot	Ignore Distraction: The devotee can concentrate well enough to screen out most distractions – a welcome ability during study or meditation.
One	One dot	Moderated Sleep: With a chance to stop and enter a trance, the character can fall asleep under any circumstances.
One	Two dots	Hold Breath: The character holds her breath for two minutes per dot of Stamina, plus one minute per success. (One roll only – no extended rolls.)
Two	Two dots	Tolerate Temperature: The devotee's discipline allows her to adjust to extreme heat or cold. She suffers no penalties from hot or cold temperatures and reduces damage dice from fire, heat, or frost damage by one die.
Two	Three dots	Transcend Pain: Reduce wound- or illness-based dice-pool penalties by one for the reminder of that scene.
Three	Three dots	Slow Bleeding and Breathing: By regulating her breath and heart rate, the devotee can avoid shock and stabilize her injuries without further complications... assuming, of course, that she isn't injured further.
Three	Four dots	Digestive control: The devotee can slow the rate of poison or toxin in her body. Each success delays the toxic effects for one hour of in-game time.
Four	Four dots	Death Trance: The devotee enters a voluntary coma. Her heart rate and breathing slow so much as to be imperceptible. Bleeding stops. Poisons and illnesses do not circulate, although external corrosives (acid, toxic waste) continue to affect the body normally. Unless scanned with advanced technology or magick, the devotee appears to be dead. In essence, she's in suspended animation for one day per success.

In time, Dante understands the names and rituals associated with Infernal powers and can put them to practical use. In such cases, the student may indeed surpass the master, thanks to the Awakened understanding that unlocks the greatest potential of the art.

Again, an Esoterica practice *must* fit the character's belief system if you want to use it as a focus; a computer mage will have a hard time wedging her study of herbalism into a technomagickal hacking routine! This rule, however, helps flesh out your character's belief system and gives you a practical use for the arcane disciplines that any mage worth that name understands.

For details about various paradigms, practices, and instruments associated with esoteric practices, see ***Focus and the Arts*** in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 565-600).

- • Dabbler: You've skimmed some New Age books or taken a handful of classes in the subject.
- •• Student: You've devoted some time and energy to esoteric subjects.
- ••• Scholar: A devoted esotericist, you've spent years building up a working knowledge of odd subjects.
- •••• Professor: Now you understand the interconnected patterns of arcane disciplines; knowing one allows you to master others more easily.
- ••••• Master: You possess a profound understanding of esoteric subjects and the practical uses behind them.

Possessed By: Monks, Professors, Clergy, New Agers, Witches, Weirdoes, Artists, Occultists, Teachers, Transhumanists, Paranormal Researchers, Monster Hunters, Fantasy Authors and Editors, Students and Masters of Arcane Arts

Suggested Specialties: Yoga, Tantra, Herbalism, Kabbalah, Fortune-Telling, Hypnosis, Astrology, Celestiography, Demonology, Sacred Geometry, Gematria, Goetia, Prophecies, Omens, T'ai Chi, I Ching, Stone Lore, Alchemy, Symbolism, Transhumanist Theory, Esoteric Musicology, Bakemono-Jutsu, Iconology, Numerology, Voodoo, Crystalmancy, Tarot, specific arcane languages (Enochian, In-o-Musubi, the Language of Flowers, etc.)

Investigation

Clues of a more mundane nature are yours to unravel. Whether you specialize in crime scenes, information retrieval, political intrigues, or other mysteries, you know what to look for, where to look for it, and how to piece it together once those pieces start becoming obvious. Your training might be informal (like, say, a taste for detective novels), but it features basic – and possibly advanced – criminology techniques as well as logistical guesswork, potential sources of information, deductive methodology, and well-honed instincts that turn raw data into potential conclusions.

- • Dabbler: You spend lots of time in the Mystery section of your favorite bookstore.
- •• Student: You've learned basic criminology.
- ••• Scholar: Detective work is your trade and passion.
- •••• Professor: Clarice Starling comes to you for advice.
- ••••• Master: Batman.

Possessed By: Crime Writers, Cops, Detectives, Stalkers, Journalists, Intelligence Agents, Smart Criminals, Black Suits, Refined Cannibal Geniuses With a Taste For Chianti

Suggested Specialties: Forensics, Deduction, Interrogation, Crime Scenes, Data Sorting, Criminal Psychology, Spotting Clues, Personal Details, Paranormal Investigations

Law

You might not be the Law, but you understand how it works. The ins and outs of cop-shops, police procedures, ranks and files, end-arounds, and other essential components of your local justice system are yours to know. Different regions, of course, have very different police systems; your grasp of New Orleans law enforcement won't help much in Tokyo. Still, modern police departments have certain elements in common, and this Knowledge can help you suss them out even if you have to beat a much higher difficulty rating in order to do so.

- • Dabbler: Beat cop.
- •• Student: Police sergeant.
- ••• Scholar: Chief or DA.
- •••• Professor: Federal bureau official.
- ••••• Master: Attorney General.

Possessed By: Cops, Lawyers, Government Agents, Criminals, Gang Bosses, Reporters

Suggested Specialties: Local Beat, Crimes, Customs, Procedures, Bribery, Internal Affairs, Courts, International Agencies, Occult Crimes, Jurisdiction, Chain of Command, Bending the Rules

Medicine

When folks get broken, you know more or less how to fix them. One or two dots in this Ability reflect basic First Aid skills, whereas higher ratings represent advanced training and experience. (Note that said training and experience might not be *formal and licensed* training and experience...) With Medicine, you've learned enough about human and humanoid bodies to treat, harm, and potentially diagnose their injuries and illnesses. Healing magicks often depend upon such understanding, and an angry mage with this Trait can be *extremely* dangerous!

For details about injury and healing, see ***Health and Injury*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 406-409)**. For information about medicine as a magickal practice, see ***Medicine Work*** in **Chapter Ten**, **(p. 581)**.

- • Dabbler: You've learned basic First Aid and CPR.
- •• Student: You can treat minor traumas and illnesses.
- ••• Scholar: Medical training allows you to pursue more serious treatments.
- •••• Professor: You've got a professional degree of skill in advanced medicine and surgical procedures.
- ••••• Master: A noted and respected healer, you're in demand for your extensive expertise.

Possessed By: Healers, Paramedics, Medical Professionals, Survivalists, Midwives, Torturers, Witches, Euthanatos, Progenitors

Suggested Specialties: First Aid, Surgery, Nursing, Bare-Bones Facilities, Improvised Techniques, Traditional Remedies, Alternative Medicine, Physical Deconstruction, Magickal Healing, Frankensteinian Techniques, "*Live, Damn You – LIVE!*"

Occult

Aren't mages occult by their very nature? Yes and no. This Knowledge represents a working comprehension of the mystic world *as most people understand it*; in short, then, such knowledge is often misleading, incomplete, or flat-out wrong. A decent rating in this Trait (three dots or higher) helps you sort the truth from the bullshit... but by then, you've also begun to understand how deep the occult rabbit-hole really goes.

"Occult" means *hidden* for very good reasons, and even the most skillful occultists often don't know nearly as much as they think they do. Being a mage does not automatically confer accurate understanding of other practices – in fact, it often muddies the waters even more! Still, this Ability grants you a decent overview of mystic practices, philosophies, lore, history, arcane cultures, and so-called secrets. Of course, they're *all* secrets by definition... or at least that's the theory, anyway.

- • Dabbler: You think you know who Crowley was, and you have some New Age books on your shelves.
- •• Student: Some of the stuff you've heard or read is actually true.
- ••• Scholar: You've got first-hand experience in the world of shadows.
- •••• Professor: Study and experience have taught you a respectable amount of genuine lore.
- ••••• Master: Knowledgeable parties respect your accomplishments and consider you an authority in your own right.

Possessed By: Moral Crusaders, Disaffected Teens, Metalheads, Goths, Pagans, New Agers, Parapsychologists, Fantasy Authors, RPG Designers, Students of Unhallowed Arts, Folks Who Spend Too Much Time on the Internet

Suggested Specialties: Neopaganism, Occult History, Conspiracy Theories, Secret Societies, New Age, Alternative Sciences, Mystic Lore, Folk Magic, Moral Panic, Urban Legends, Satanic Folklore, Pop-Culture Satanism, Actual Satanism, any specific occult discipline or field (Freemasonry, Voodoo, Stage Magic, etc.)

Politics

Political power can seem like magic. With a few words in the right person's ear or a form filled out the proper way, you can make people disappear, change identities, incite scandals, and make or unmake kings. For certain mages – especially Technocrats, Hermetics, Ecstatics, and Virtual Adepts – such power is more effective than obvious spells; in a global era, the ability to throw lightning bolts pales in comparison to the clout to stage a riot ... or a coup.

Literally the "art of cities," this Knowledge helps your character work the reins of power – government agencies, law enforcement bureaus, celebrity culture, and so on. In game terms, this Trait combines a number of separate Knowledges from previous editions (Power-Brokering, Covert Culture, etc.) into a unified understanding of civil influence. As with several other Knowledges, you can use the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option to purchase several specialties once you reach four dots in the Trait. Each specialty reflects a different sphere of influence.

For coincidental Mind-based Effects, you could also use Politics as a focus instrument, assuming that you're willing to let that Effect take a bit of time. A clever mage, for instance, could implant an otherwise ridiculous idea ("*the President is a Muslim Nazi space alien*") in the minds of a few influential parties and then let that idea spread through political channels over time. This sort of thing cannot be done abruptly, though; political influence is a subtle tool, and vulgar Effects weaken its influence.

Unlike stealth or violence, the Politics Trait demands a certain amount of patience and finesse. You can't just charm a district attorney and then walk away from a murder rap – there are too many people and procedures involved

in law enforcement situations. Still, this Knowledge helps your character know who those people are and which strings can make them dance. Though it's not a glamorous skill, it might be among the most potent tools in the modern world.

For game systems involving social influence, see ***Social Occasions and Intrigue*** in **Chapter Nine**, (pp. 402-404). For magickal practices that employ political clout, see the ***Art of Desire*** and ***Dominion*** practices, the ***Management and Human Resources*** option, and their associated instruments, all in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 573, 577, and 595).

- • Dabbler: Amateur power-broker.
- •• Student: Devotee of influence.
- ••• Scholar: A skillful manipulator of civil institutions.
- •••• Professor: Magnificent bastard.
- ••••• Master: Machiavelli's ghost whispers in your ear.

Possessed By: Politicians, Activists, Pundits, Lawyers, Journalists, Kingpins, Tycoons, Celebrities, Syndicate Ops, NWO Agents, Cult Gurus, Leaders of All Kinds

Suggested Specialties: Legal Codes, Law Enforcement, Gang Culture, Local Government, National Government, International Politics, Corporate Influence, Media Influence, Blogosphere, Loopholes, Dog Whistles, Radical Politics, Celebrity Media, Organized Crime, Power-Brokering, Specific Groups (U.S. Congress, News Corporation, Anonymous, the Mafia, etc.), Specific Cultures (Militia Movements, Neo-Communists, Conspiracy-Theorists, Jihadis, Anarchists), Specific Supernatural Groups (Traditions, Technocracy, Faerie Courts, Vampire Courts, etc.)

Science

A small word for vast ideas, *science* essentially means "to know." In game terms, this Trait reflects an understanding of scientific principles, research, history, and applications. Every Technocrat or technomancer *must* have a few dots in this Ability, and most have quite a few of them. In the modern world, the majority of people have at least one dot in Science; even if you believe in God or magick, you can still accept science as a valid approach to reality. (Really? Yep – see the sidebar ***SCIENCE!!!***)

The Science Trait covers a rudimentary understanding of common principles, plus a given focus of specialization. High ratings reflect increasing knowledge about the various sciences, with deepening understanding of your specialization. As with Crafts, you define one specialty for your character's primary Science and then purchase different specialties to reflect different sciences. Also, as with Crafts, your Storyteller may allow the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option that lets you buy multiple Sciences for fewer points. This way, a well-trained scientist can master a variety of fields.

For science- and tech-based practices see ***Alchemy***, ***Art of Desire/ Hypereconomics***, ***Cybernetics***, ***Hypertech***, ***Reality-Hacking*** and ***Weird Science*** under ***Practice: The Shape of Focus***, **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 572-586).

- • Dabbler: You've got a typical high school science education and understand the basic principles of your field.
- •• Student: You possess an advanced science education and understand the major theories, principles, and concepts of your preferred field.
- ••• Scholar: You've dedicated yourself to scientific inquiry and possess a detailed knowledge of your chosen discipline.
- •••• Professor: Impressive scholarship, plus devoted study and research, make you an expert in your field and a master of generalized science.
- ••••• Master: Very few peers can match your expertise, understanding, and respect within the field.

Possessed By: Teachers, Technicians, Would-Be Superheroes, Tech Geeks, Any Technocrat or Technomantic Mage

Suggested Specialties: Almost any hard scientific field. Soft or social sciences, like history or anthropology, fall under the ***Academics*** Knowledge instead.

Scientific Specialties

Common "respectable" Science variations practiced by Awakened characters include, but are not limited to, the following potential specialties:

- **Aeronautics:** Design, construction, and operation of aircraft and other flying machines.
- **Astronomy:** Study of stellar bodies, celestial mechanics, and outer space.
- **Biology:** Research into the mysteries within Earth's organic life forms.
- **Biopsychology:** Tracing (and often altering) the interplay between a living being's physical state and its psychological state.
- **Chemistry:** Deciphering and manipulating the chemical codes within Earthly substances.
- **Computer Science:** IT system languages, logistics, theory, advancement, and implementation.
- **Cybernetics:** Research, development, and implementation of interconnected organic matter and machines.
- **Electronics:** Harnessing and exploring the potential of electronic energies and devices.
- **Engineering:** Design, research, and construction of essential structures. Engineering has many variations; if there's a structure involved in a project, then there's an engineering discipline involved in creating and maintaining that structure.
- **Forensic Pathology:** Reconstructing evidence from scattered and fragmented clues.

- **Genetics:** Research, analysis, and manipulation involving the literal "building blocks of life."
- **Geology:** Study of earthly formations, materials, and phenomena.
- **Hypermathematics:** Esoteric, arcane, theoretical, and sometimes absurd applications of advanced mathematical principles, often tied to the links between science, faith, and magick.
- **Mathematics:** Study of equations, numbers, patterns, and the interplay between them.
- **Metallurgy:** Research, refinement, and implementation involving the properties and functions of various metallic substances, alloys, and compounds... though not, unfortunately, musicians.
- **Paraphysics:** "Proper" name for Dimensional Science, also known as the interrelationship between Earthly reality and the Otherworlds.
- **Phylogeny:** Study of transition and transformation, their effects, and the potential uses of both.
- **Physics:** Observations and research regarding the interrelationships between matter and energy. *Theoretical physics* deals with potential but currently unproven models of physics, whereas *practical physics* deals with known applications of established physics.
- **Psychodynamics:** Study and application of human and humanoid mental processes – specifically the relationships between emotional responses, mental health, physical state, and outward behavior. Although some Technocrats consider this a soft science, those who manipulate identity, memory, and behavior find it *extremely* useful.
- **Psychology:** Study of human consciousness and behavior, and their related therapies.
- **Psychopharmacology:** Research, development, and applications dealing with the interplay between psychoactive substances and human/ humanoid consciousness, perceptions, and behavior.
- **Psychoprojection:** Research into the multiple disciplines and effects of extraphysical consciousness co- and relocation. In plain English, the study of astral projection, multiple selves, and travel into the Digital Web.
- **Sociobiology:** Observation and manipulation of societies as extended organisms – composed of individual beings – that nurture, protect, and reproduce themselves. By researching the tendencies of such organisms, sociobiologists strive to understand and influence societies... and the individuals within them.
- **Xenobiology:** Study, analysis and understanding of alien organisms: monsters, spirits, mythic beasts, and other things conventional science does not currently accept as real.

Radical scientists – Etherites, Ecstatics, Virtual Adepts, and even some maverick Technocrats, among others – have dozens, perhaps *hundreds*, of other disciplines, ranging from Etherdynamics to Chaos Math to Coprophrenology (don't ask...). Naturally, such sciences are not generally accepted by the community at large; this, of course, just inspires their proponents to prove how true their theories really are...

Secondary Abilities

Mages are a skillful lot. They *have* to be, to do what they do. And so, in addition to the usual core Abilities, there's a range of additional Talents, Skills, and Knowledges that you can choose from as well. Many of them deal with specialized fields or characters (Akashics, Ecstatics, NWO ops, and so forth), but within certain parameters (see the entries), anyone with the right background can learn them.

Secondary Talents

Like the core Talents, these Traits represent natural inclinations honed through practice. Several of them, like Flying, are extremely unusual in the grand scheme of things, though others, like Carousing, are fairly common.

Animal Kinship

You have a natural affinity for animals, so much so that you seem to be part animal yourself. Perhaps you've learned ancestral techniques of animal communion. Maybe you're a shapeshifter with the heart of a beast. Wherever your Talent comes from, you connect with animals on a level that often seems downright... *primal*.

On a practical level, this Talent helps you puzzle out hierarchies, read moods or states of health, communicate through vocalizations and body language, and come to understandings on an animal level. This doesn't mean an animal will necessarily *like* you, but you can respect one another as peers. Intelligent animals tend to be easier to commune with than primitive ones; it's far simpler to bond with, say, a wolf than with a shark. Hence, Animal Kinship difficulties are lower with smart or trusting beasts than with alien, hostile, or simple-minded ones.

SCIENCE!!!

Despite common misconceptions, science is not the enemy of magic or religion, much less a plot to enslave the world. What science is, literally, is the pursuit of knowledge – provable, repeatable, verifiable *knowledge*. And because mysticism and faith are so hard to repeat, verify, or prove in relatively objective forms, those belief systems often wind up getting a wary eye from science.

That said, these three disciplines do not *have* to be antagonistic. A scientist can have faith, can even be a mage... and a mage can appreciate science, too. After all, you're reading this book because science *works*; if it didn't, there'd be no paper, no ink, no binding, no computers to craft the book, and no way to get these words from my keyboard to your eyes. (If you're reading this on an e-reader, my point is even more obvious.)

"Wait – I Can *Explain*!"

Because so much of the modern world depends upon scientific technology, and because scientific principles have been fundamental elements of education for centuries (often over the objections of religious *fundamentalists*), magick that can be explained in scientific terms is often coincidental, not vulgar, in technologically developed areas. As a result, although science depends upon consistency – and thus demands a certain amount of consistency in its explanations – a character can use his Science Trait to deploy a scientific rationale for what he's doing. If he succeeds, that Effect will probably be considered coincidental unless it's totally beyond the pale.

In game terms, the player rolls Manipulation or Charisma + Science, with the difficulty based on the feat in question and the roleplaying involved in explaining it to everyone else. Meanwhile, the character unleashes a torrent of sci-speak that will hopefully make enough sense to justify the feat. Why do mad scientists ramble on about their pet theories while turning on that death ray? Because *SCIENCE!* That's why.

In Theory...

This leads to an important point: in science, *theory* does not mean "something I think might be true." As any scientist will tell you, *a scientific theory must be tested, challenged, and verified through repeated experiments and evidence*. A supposition that withstands those challenges without being disproved and winds up being accepted through peer review is considered a theory. This is why Technocrats, Etherites, and Virtual Adepts argue constantly about their pet theories: it's a form of peer review that gives credibility to weird-ass technomagick.

What this means, in practical terms, is that technomancers *cannot* just do whatever they want and then pass it off as science. In order to *be* science, it *has* to stand up under review. Otherwise, it's just... um, magic.

And no self-respecting scientist wants to admit he's doing *that*.

"There Must be Some *Rational* Explanation..."

The flip side to this technomagickal advantage is that science-based reality-alteration doesn't just have to be accepted by a bunch of stupid Sleepers: *the technomancer must believe in it as well*. Sure, his theories might be skewed, demented, even impossible by normal scientific standards, but they must make *sense*... at least to him, and probably to the people he respects. A Progenitor hypergeneticist, for example, might be able to clone a werewolf, isolate "the changing gene," or kill the beast with an infusion of silver nitrate. He could *not*, however, simply wave his hand and turn the werewolf to silver. *That's not science!* Awakened/Inspired Science can get pretty weird, but – according to the beliefs of the people who use it – it cannot do the impossible.

Thus, technomagick is a double-edged scalpel: you can use it more freely in the modern world, but it must make a certain degree of sense within a scientific belief system. If it does not, *the character himself does not believe in the results*... and we all know what happens when Wile E. Coyote looks down and sees that he's running on thin air.

In game terms, a Storyteller may feel free to call shenanigans on a player's explanation when that explanation does not fit the character's belief system. If the Progenitor mentioned above tried to explain his silvery wave as "disrupting the molecular structure and shifting the elemental spectrum through my new theory of manual destabilizing conversion," then *POOF!* It's vulgar magick. No scientific coincidences for *you!* This offers clever challenges for the technomantic player, provides fun roleplaying material, and forces him to think of his deeds in terms of the character's beliefs.

You See?

The core of that character's beliefs can be found on the character sheet, under *Science*. You see, science *is* a belief system, and the dots and Specialties of the Science Trait reflect the way your scientist believes that science works. (The ***Common Mage Paradigms*** in **Chapter Ten** suggest a variety of scientific worldviews, too; see **pp. 568-572**.)

The Science Trait isn't just a line on your character sheet. In many ways, it's a roleplaying guide for your character's creed. Those Traits explain his methodology, define his beliefs, and suggest the sorts of things he'll do, both with his Arts and in general. They'll show you the sorts of Devices he might use or invent, tell you the sorts of friends and rivals he has, and probably inspire all kinds of rants as he shares his theories with the world at large. *Science*, as we've seen, means "to know," and most people who take science seriously want everyone *else* to know about their science too. Even if the rest of us consider them mad scientists, their madness is the kind of faith any mage can understand.

Successes on an Animal Kinship roll can also help you lower the difficulty of a Riding roll or let you pass as "just another animal" if you've shapeshifted into beast form. With a **Training** specialty, you can train certain kinds of animals too; each beast type (horses, raptors, big cats, etc.) requires its own specialty, though the ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option may give you a break when buying several specialties. Even then, though, this is a *Talent*, not a *power*. You can get on an animal's good side easily enough, but if you push that relationship too far, your friend is history.

- • Novice: Domesticated animals tend to like you.
- •• Practiced: Skittish animals tend to trust you.
- ••• Skillful: Wild animals tend to respect you.
- •••• Expert: Folks call you "the Beast Whisperer."
- ••••• Master: You seem closer to animals than to human beings.

Possessed By: Shapeshifters, Farmers, Hunters, Grooms, Witches, K-9 Cops, Animal Trainers, Pet Companions, Naturalists, Feral People Raised By Beasts

Suggested Specialties: Dominance, Befriending, Calming, Bonding, Reading Signs, "Talk To the Animals," Training (specific animals – Canines & Lupines, Felines, Horses, Raptors, etc.)

Blatancy

Through theatrical flair, audience appraisal, and raw audacity, you're good at getting away with blatant acts of magick. Typically, this involves using tried-and-true dodges: "*We're shooting a movie*," "*It's all an illusion*," "*Haven't you ever seen a flash-mob before?*" – that sort of thing. As you might expect, such claims typically require props to lend credibility to your claims (a "camera crew," stage magic gear, a pack of willing conspirators, etc.). If and when you have the goods to back up your dodge, however, you can pull reality over people's eyes more often than you would be able to do otherwise.

A potentially problematic Talent, this Trait comes with several caveats. As mentioned above, a mage who wants to use it must be able to back up her claims with evidence. Despite common preconceptions, most people aren't stupid, and – especially in the age of YouTube, cell phones, and wireless Internet access – the ability to look up "famous stage magicians" and "reality TV shows filming in my area" is literally within the grasp of the average bystander. Blatancy works best when you play to your location's dominant belief system, have the props (physical and social) to back up your claims, and get the hell out of Dodge before folks start asking too many questions.

In story terms, this Trait gives your character an edge if she employs a credible explanation while doing something that should not be possible but looks as though it *could* be. It *does not work* when that character does things for which no reasonable explanation exists. You could, for example, explain a suddenly healed wound with, "*Look! It was just make-up*" or "*Head wounds just bleed a lot;*" you could not, however, conjure a dragon and then shout, "*Cool special effects, huh?*" In order to employ this Talent at all, you must have something that passes for a rational explanation by the standards of your audience and then avoid pushing the envelope too far.

In game terms, a successful Manipulation + Blatancy roll – *combined with a reasonable explanation for the magickal deed in question* – may allow a player to turn a normally vulgar magickal Effect into a coincidental one.

These days, this sort of thing is a lot easier for Technocrats, Ecstatics, martial artists, trusted clergy, and stage magicians than it is for garden-variety mages. And in regions with mystical cultures, it's far more likely that a trusted local will get away with Blatancy than it is to assume that some newcomer with fancy words will accomplish the same thing. Folks in traditional cultures are not morons either. If some stupid white man shows up and starts thinking he can play Cargo Cult with the natives, he's gonna get his ass kicked.

That said, a charismatic speaker who knows her audience can get away with amazing amounts of nonsense. People truly *will* fall for ridiculous ideas if and when the speaker plays to their fears, hopes, prejudice, and faith. In real life, folks accept blatant absurdities as truth all the time. A clever player/character can manipulate the locals if and when she puts some imagination and sweat equity behind this Trait. Smart roleplaying, combined with advance preparation, ought to pay off under most circumstances.

As a general guide to the potential difficulty or success required with a Blatancy roll, you may use the ***Blatancy Effects chart***. On that chart, *Difficulty* offers a base difficulty for the roll, *Successes Needed* suggests a minimum number of successes before the roll succeeds. *Effect* gives a guideline for the size or scope of the magickal act in question; larger or more obvious acts of magick would demand a higher difficulty and/ or more successes rolled. Finally, *Explanation* offers the type of rationale a character might give; the lamer the explanation, the higher the difficulty and the more successes you'd need to get away with using it. Generally, you'd use either Effect or Explanation to determine the roll's difficulty; if you're compounding them – say, a Blatant Effect with a Lame Explanation – add +1 or more to the difficulty. That said, the chart provides a guideline only. The Storyteller may also ignore the chart if he feels it does not suit the chronicle or circumstances.

Ultimately, the Storyteller is the final arbiter regarding the effects of a Blatancy attempt. If the explanation sucks, if the props do not support the claim, if the people are clearly being played for fools, then the roll will not succeed, *period.*

For details about reality and belief, see the ***Reality Zones*** section of **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 611-617)**. And for guidelines about the limits of coincidence, check out ***Coincidental Magick vs. Vulgar Magick***, also in **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 530-532)**.

- • Novice: "No, seriously – we're filming a video."
- •• Practiced: "That just *looked* easy. It took me *years* to figure out how to do that trick."
- ••• Skillful: "All the necessary permits and explanations are posted on our website."
- •••• Expert: "We did this trick on *Mythbusters*."
- ••••• Master: "Nothing to see here – move along."

Possessed By: Celebrities, Media Magicians, Pundits, Deejays, SPX Techs, Filmmakers, Stunt Artists, Martial Artists, Black Suits, Show Promoters

Suggested Specialties: Religious Appeal, Political Paranoia, Stage Magic, Film Crew, Appeals to Vanity, Cool Gadgets, Geek Culture, Sheer Balls, Legal Authority, *Science!*, We're On a Mission From God

Blatancy Effects

Difficulty	Successes Needed	Effect	Explanation
6	One+	Explainable	Believable: "Top-secret experimental hardware."
7	One+	Startling	Questionable: "Flash mob – see the cameras?"
8	Two+	Blatant	Lame: "Gas-main explosion!"
9	Two+	Incredible	Seriously?: "Huh? I didn't see anything unusual."
10	Three+	Absurd	Um, No...: "It's the Rapture! Make your peace with God!"

Carousing

You specialize in sharing the good times. This doesn't *have* to involve drinking and debauchery... but it usually does anyway. Wherever you happen to be, you can probably spark a party and get the majority of folks to go along with you – possibly over their usual edges and into something new and wild. Typically associated with the Cult of Ecstasy, this Talent can break shackles of propriety and bust inhibitions into little pieces.

- • Novice: "YOLO!"
- •• Practiced: "Do a little dance/ Make a little love/ Get down tonight..."
- ••• Skillful: "Sin, that you might be forgiven."
- •••• Expert: "The only real blasphemy is the refusal of joy."
- ••••• Master: "'Do what thou wilt' shall be the whole of the law."

Possessed By: Music Stars, Party Animals, Frat Boys, Bon Vivants, Cult Leaders, Ecstatics, Nephandic Seducers, Agents of Subversion, Left-Hand Path Devotees

Suggested Specialties: High Society, Teenage Mayhem, Overcoming Inhibitions, Violating Vows, Classy Debauchery, Wild Parties, Master of Ceremonies, Mystic Justifications, Get This Party Started

Do

Often mistaken for a mere martial art, Do is the devotion to a way of life. A time-honored secret of the Akashic Brotherhood (who began to hide its practice when Do was abused by lesser souls), the art is occasionally taught to non-Brothers in the interest of keeping Do alive.

Although it's reflected by a unique collection of combat maneuvers and magickal techniques, the Way is far more than a simple series of advantages. In story terms, Do is a highly disciplined state of being. Diet, philosophy, meditation, internal and external reflection, and a refined sense of one's place in the cosmos all characterize the study of Do; a character who does not pursue each element of that study cannot master the art's benefits. The Storyteller should make sure that a practitioner of Do acts accordingly. If the character behaves with selfish excess, he loses his ability to access Do. In many regards, Do is much more than a few dots on a character sheet. To the mages who pursue it, Do invests, guides, and enhances everything they do.

The five ranks of Do are often associated with five stages of understanding. Ranging from the humble yet efficient insect stage through the various forms of animal, these levels reflect the growing comprehension of innate potential within a student's thick head. Especially within this distraction-prone age, few students attain the fifth rank... and though it *might* be possible for someone outside the Akashayana to reach such mastery, that idea seems like a joke to those who understand the essence of Do.

In game terms, Do is more of a way of being than a learned Skill. Even so, it can be taught *only* by an Akashic mage, and it requires total devotion from the student. The Storyteller may consider Do to be an exclusively Akashic Ability – it's been that way for thousands of years, after all. A beginning Akashic character may put *no more than two dots* into Do; all other dots must be earned through in-game experience. (The Storyteller can waive this rule for a "masters-level" chronicle.) A non-Akashic character cannot start the game with *any* dots in Do – again, those dots must be earned through experience.

In order to purchase dots in the Do Talent, a character must also have *at least* two dots of an appropriate "limb" Ability for each dot in Do. If Samuel "Green Tiger" Nakamura, for example, has three dots in Do, then he must also have at least six dots in Abilities related to the "eight limbs of Do." For details about extensive rewards of the art, see the entry for ***Do*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 426-430)**. For lesser forms of martial arts, see the ***Martial Arts*** Skill entry above.

- • Insect (ant, grasshopper, mantis, roach, etc.): Initiated into the simplest secrets of Do, you've begun learning the proper methods of diet, meditation, and exercise.
- •• Crawler (lizard, snake, toad, etc.): Like the beasts that crawl upon the earth, you're beginning to discover the keys to a higher state. Your body, mind, and spirit have achieved a kind of unity; with that understanding, you're capable of impressive feats.

••• Four-Footed Animal (horse, dog, cat, etc.): Like the greater beasts, you have unlocked the power of natural attainment. Your hands become like claws or hooves; your body surges with a strength unknown to most of those who would consider themselves human. This is the highest level many devotees achieve, the rank of an accomplished *Tao-shih*.

•••• Bipedal Animal (monkey, bear, ape, etc.): Through great effort and understanding, you've opened the gates that hold lesser beings in their distracted state. Your body, mind, and spirit can accomplish miraculous things, and you have earned the right to be considered a true heir of Do, a *Sihing*. To go beyond this point requires supreme devotion and a practice that typically takes lifetimes to refine.

••••• True Humanity: Your devotion has returned you to the original state of human grace. At this point, you no longer concern yourself with what *can* be done, but merely with what *should* be done. Only now might you be regarded as a *Sifu*: a Master of the Way.

Possessed By: Akashayana and perhaps Their Most Trusted Companions

Suggested Specialties: External (forceful) Style, Internal (meditative) Style, Weapon Forms, Energetic Alchemy, Katas, Animal-Form Techniques

Flying

People don't usually fly. You do. Whether it's because you've got (or can grow) wings and you know how to use them or else you're simply practiced in the fine art of aerial maneuvers, you're at home in the air as well as on the ground.

Unlike the ***Jetpack*** Skill, this Talent reflects a knack for unassisted flying. To possess it, a character must have either wings or the innate (or magickal) power of flight. Really small or precarious flying methods (brooms, carpets, levitation discs, etc.) can count as Flying methods too; such control involves more instinct and comfort than technological expertise. For climbs, plunges, take-offs, landings, fancy moves, chases, aerial combat, or other airborne feats, this Talent comes in handy when you take to the sky.

• Novice: Suicide case.

•• Practiced: Awkward angel.

••• Skillful: Quidditch player.

•••• Expert: Winged avenger.

••••• Master: Wind-dancer.

Possessed By: Witches, Shapeshifters, Bird-Folk, Angelic or Demonic Entities, Magic Carpet Riders, Arcane Athletes, Crouching Tigers and Hidden Dragons

Suggested Specialties: Broomsticks, Sports, Aerial Combat, Hunting, Strafing, Carrying Passengers, Chi-Based Levitation

High Ritual

There's both an art and a science to a good rite. You've studied not only the techniques and trappings of ritual practices but also the symbolic, psychological, and metaphysical principles behind the big show. In general, this Talent reflects a familiarity with rituals appropriate to your spiritual or magickal pursuits; a Catholic priest understands the various Church ceremonies, whereas an Eleusinian priestess knows her way around Greek mystery rites. Beyond that knowledge, though, you understand not only the rituals of your chosen practice but also possess a gift for staging rituals in general.

Game-wise, the High Ritual Skill allows you to plan and execute rituals. A successful roll (typically Manipulation or Charisma + High Ritual) lets your character perform or support anything from a wedding feast to a mystic rite. This roll's difficulty depends upon your character's familiarity with the practice in question: simple rites in his cultural tradition would be easy, and elaborate rituals in a foreign practice would be pretty damned hard. A successful High Ritual roll might reduce the difficulty of a magickal working, whereas a blown one might add to the difficulty instead. (See below.)

Certain Effects that would probably be considered vulgar magick *might* be considered coincidental if performed during a successful and appropriate ritual. An Awakened evangelist, for example, could effectively lay on hands or drive out demons during a potent Christian rite – such a setting encourages belief in such events. Although this sort of thing should not be taken for granted, a skillful ritualist can expand the bounds of possibility and evoke apparent miracles. Note that *this Talent does not "stack" with the Blatancy Talent*. A character with both must choose one or the other, not use both at one time.

For the rules about modifying magick rolls with Abilities, see ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects*** in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 532-535). For details about rituals and belief, see ***Coincidental Magick vs. Vulgar Magick***, and ***Rituals, Rolls, and Extended Successes***, also in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 530-532 and 538-543).

• Novice: You could plan a wedding, call the corners, or recite the Stations of the Cross.

•• Practiced: Your parties and rites earn respect from your community.

••• Skillful: Beyond your familiarity with specific rituals, you've begun learning about other practices as well.

•••• Expert: An acclaimed priest or priestess, you've got a knack for powerful ceremonies and a broad understanding of specific ritual techniques.

••••• Master: You've mastered not only the rites of your culture but many ritual practices of other cultures too. So potent is your knowledge that you could make atheists into believers.

Possessed By: Clergy, Occultists, Entertainers, High Magicians, Showboating Frauds, Comparative Religion Specialists, Ritual Mages, Citizen Evangelists, Party Planners, Church or Funeral Directors

Suggested Specialties: High Mass, Obscure Rituals, Spontaneous Rituals, Secular Ceremonies, Music Concerts, Impossible Miracles, specific cultural rites (Jewish, Catholic, Satanic, Voudoun, etc.)

Lucid Dreaming

Most folks float through dreams with no sense of control. Not you. When you choose to assert yourself in the dreamlands, you may shift the tone of a dream, change locations, confront nightmares head-on, or even construct dreams of your choosing. Cosmologically, you know how to tap into the essence of Maya and turn it in your favor. With practice, you might create a ***Demesne*** Background (see below) that suits your temperament.

In game terms, this Talent lets you manipulate your surroundings in a dream (Perception + Lucid Dreaming, difficulty 6); shape new structures (difficulty 8); or take complete control over that dream and your place in it (difficulty 9).

You can use this Talent to direct conscious meditations, too (difficulties 5, 7, and 8, respectively), which can help you gain insights, unravel riddles, and achieve a state of calm or resolution. If you're meditating or dreaming about a particular enigma, then your successes – after you wake up – count as if they were successes on an Enigmas roll. Jennifer Rollins, as an example, meditates about a puzzle she wants to solve, and so her successes with a Lucid Dreaming roll count as successes used to solve that puzzle; once she leaves the trance, she understands how those pieces fit together.

For the ***Demesne*** Background, see that entry in this chapter, (pp. 510-511). For game systems involved in riddles, puzzles, and enigmas, see ***Art and Science*** and ***Social Occasions and Intrigue*** in **Chapter Nine**, (p. 404).

- • Novice: You're aware of your dreams and can remember them if you choose.
- •• Practiced: You can try to dream a certain dream.
- ••• Skillful: Some control over your dreams.
- •••• Expert: You know how to influence and read dreams as aspects of your inner self.
- ••••• Master: You understand the metaphysical elements of dreams and can manipulate them, recall them, inspire them, or share them to your will.

Possessed By: Shamans, Sages, Witches, Artists, Savants, Philosophers, Dream Researchers, Marauders, Martial Artists, Fey-Blooded People, The Dream Police

Suggested Specialties: Dream Control, Waking From Nightmares, Puzzling Enigmas, Visionquesting, Omens, Dream Combat, Demesne

Search

Given time and motivation, you know how to toss a room or comb the woods. You've honed an eye for clues, mastered the classic hiding spaces (and puzzled out some new ones), and learned how to follow your instincts. If there's something to be found, you're likely to find it... and if you combine this Talent with Sphere 1 Effects, there's not much that can hide from you for long.

- • Novice: You're good at finding lost stuff.
- •• Practiced: Clues seem to jump out at you.
- ••• Skillful: The last place to look is the first place you try.
- •••• Expert: The pros consult you when something or someone needs to be found.
- ••••• Master: Your gift for detections seems downright supernatural... and probably is.

Possessed By: Burglars, Shakedown Experts, Detectives, Inspectors, Profilers, Bounty Hunters, Black Suits, CSI Teams

Suggested Specialties: Tossing, Hidden Spaces, Likely Places, Outdoor Cues, Police Procedures, Concealed Doors, Telltale Marks

Seduction

You're good at being bad. A master of attraction, you can draw people into engagements they might otherwise ignore or avoid. We're not talking about simple chemistry here, although you can certainly *augment* your chemistry with a little Life or Mind magick. This Talent reflects the combination of carnal allure and emotional manipulation that can wind people around your fingers (or other parts of your anatomy...) whenever you want their attention.

Seduction isn't always sexual. It *does*, however, play off the target's desires. Note that you don't have to be gorgeous to use this Ability; many seducers, in fact, seem unremarkable until they put this gift to work. For game systems associated with social machinations, see the ***Social Occasions and Intrigue*** entry in **Chapter Nine**.

- • Novice: You can score desperate drunks.
- •• Practiced: You can have almost anyone you want.
- ••• Skillful: You're good enough to get people to go against their better natures.
- •••• Expert: Turn on the charm, turn off their brains.
- ••••• Master: Vows, homes, hearts, and marriages are yours to break at will.

Possessed By: Spies, Manipulators, Users, Subverters, Ecstatics, Nephandi, Pretty Strangers, Demon Lovers, Vampires in Many Senses of That Word

Suggested Specialties: Raw Sex, Appealing to Kinks, False Innocence, Topping From Below, Subtle Moves, "Let's be Bad Guys," Crude But Effective

Secondary Skills

Magick demands a wide range of skills. Especially among the Technocratic field ops, specialized training provides the expertise to handle anything from a blaster cannon to a horse race. Of all Ability categories, the following Skills may provide the widest range of potential Traits... and yet, for certain Paths, these secondary vocations may be the most vital Abilities of all.

Acrobatics

Dazzling feats of athletic grace are yours to perform. Despite the limitations of physics and biology, you defy gravity and make it look easy. Naturally, there's intense practice and dedication involved in such discipline – it didn't come easily, and you must hone such skills with constant exercise. Still, your flexible precision seems downright magical and, especially if you add in Life, Time, and Correspondence Spheres, might be literally inhuman!

- • Novice: Practiced tumbler.
- •• Practiced: High school gymnast.
- ••• Skillful: Professional acrobat.
- •••• Expert: Olympic-level contender.
- ••••• Master: Cirque Du Soleil artist.

Possessed By: Martial Artists, Circus Stunt Performers, Performers, Dancers, Gymnasts, Aerialists, Extreme Athletes, Shapeshifters

Suggested Specialties: Aerial Arts, Martial Arts, Stunts, Falls, Trapeze, Competition Gymnastics, Floor Work, Enhanced Jumping, Parkour

Archery

You can shoot humanity's most venerable long-distance weapon: the bow. Beyond its obvious practical applications, this Skill can become a meditative art as well – and is practiced as such by Zen archers and other enthusiasts. Because bows launch wooden shafts, they make good weapons against vampires... and because they're almost silent, bows offer efficient gear for assassins and spies as well.

For details about bows and crossbows, see **Chapter Nine**, **(p. 419 and 452)**.

- • Novice: Kid in archery class.
- •• Practiced: SCAdian archer.
- ••• Skillful: Bow-hunter.
- •••• Expert: Katniss Everdeen.
- ••••• Master: Legolas.

Possessed By: Snipers, Hunters, Commandos, Assassins, Survivalists, Athletes, Outlaws, Recreationists, Folks From Arboreal Cultures, Fans of *The Hunger Games*, Would-Be Elves

Suggested Specialties: Longbow, Crossbow, Hunting, Horse-Archery, Trick Shots, Killing Shots, Kyudou Techniques, Arched Flight, Primitive Archery

Biotech

Bodies are the original machines, and technology invents new machines to go along with them. You understand the connections between organic and mechanical systems and can work the places where they interface. An absolutely essential Skill for the cyborgs and cybernetic engineers of Iteration X, the Progenitors, the Virtual Adepts, and certain Etherite factions, Biotech gives you hands-on training and experience with cybernetic technology. Naturally, you need various Science Knowledges in order to design, invent, and install

such technology; with this Skill, though, you've got practical applications to back up all that information.

For rules about cybernetic gear, see the ***Enhancements*** Background later in this chapter, (pp. 312-313), and ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**, (pp. 657-661). For biotech as a technomagickal focus, see the ***Cybernetics*** and ***Hypertech*** practices in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 576-579).

- • Novice: Given a basic understanding of biotech principles, you've seen the design and implementation of such technology. Despite your lack of experience, you might be able to make very simple repairs if need be.
- •• Practiced: Now you've got the experience to make basic repairs and can design and install simple biotech machines.
- ••• Skillful: Honed by study, field work, and laboratory experimentation, you've got serious chops with regards to cybernetic technology.
- •••• Expert: You're good enough to create, install, and maintain radical designs, perform major overhauls on existing tech, and employ almost any biotech Device or Procedure within your field. (Weird stuff from those demented Etherites is probably beyond your grasp... but really, does *anyone* truly understand those mad bastards?)
- ••••• Master: You could compare notes with Tony Stark.

Possessed By: Cyborgs, Cybernetic Maintenance Techs, Q Division, Genegineers, Mad Scientists, Transhumanists

Suggested Specialties: Cloning, Cybernetics, Mad Theories, Repair, Field Mods, Redesign, Nanotech, Floronics, Biomechanisms, Biomods, Web-Based Interface

Energy Weapons

When the only things standing between innocent bystanders and a raging Reality Deviant are you, your blaster, and the ability to use it, this becomes a must-have Skill. Laser guns, particle-beam accelerators, plasma hand-cannons, ectoplasmic disrupters, and other advanced weaponry demand advanced handling; any *ape* can fire a revolver, but only specially trained personnel know how to employ hypertech weaponry.

This Ability reflects a basic understanding of energy weapon technology (or at least the ability to turn it on, point it in the right direction, and not blow your own hand off with it), and the essential skills involved in handling, maintaining, adjusting, loading, and storing the tools of Technocratic security. For a small selection of energy weapons, see ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**.

- • Novice: Imperial Stormtrooper.
- •• Practiced: Competent shooter.
- ••• Skillful: Average Technocratic field operative.
- •••• Expert: Elite Op.
- ••••• Master: "Phased plasma rifle in the 40-Watt range..."

Possessed By: Cyborgs, Space Marines, Black Suits, Covert Agents, Etherite Heroes

Suggested Specialties: Heavy Weapons, Experimental Tech, Repair, Small Arms, Field Modifications, Cybernetic Weaponry, Micro-Gravitational Operations, Sniper, Pulp-Tech

Hypertech

There's mundane technology, and then there's the stuff that technomages command. This latter tech is not, of course, "magick" – perish *that* thought! Still, its principles transcend the limited understanding of the Masses and their convenient little world. The advanced principles employed by the Technocracy, Virtual Adepts, various mad scientists, and even the technomancers of other, more traditional pursuits all range outside everyday sciences. These arcane technologies – nanotech, Trinary computing, extradimensional travel, and so on – seem mysterious even to many of the rank-and-file who employ them. *You*, however, understand how such things work... and through such understanding, you can modify existing Devices, create your own, or employ machines created by other technomancer mages.

At Ranks 1 and 2, a character with this Skill understands only the principles behind her own group's Devices; an Etherite, for example, can puzzle out the workings of a colleague's contraptions, but she would wind up stymied by, say, an Iteration X Device. At Rank 3 and above, however, that same mag... I mean, *scientist* could decipher the odd perversions of scientific truth behind such alien Devices – and, by extension, could use or even modify them. In game terms, this means that a successful Hypertech roll would allow a technomancer to employ a tool or Device that would not normally work for him due to its secure or unconventional design. If you're running a Technocratic operative, this is a pretty big deal; the warped confections of mad scientists begin to make a practical kind of sense... which means, of course, that you can now convert those insane Devices to more *sensible* purposes.

Your Hypertech rating cannot be higher than your rating in the ***Technology*** Skill. If you don't understand the basics, after all, how will you wrap your head around the big stuff? As with the Computer Knowledge, your ability to focus Sphere Effects through hypertech may be limited to the dots in your Hypertech Trait. For details about technomagickal practices, see the ***Cybernetics***, ***Hypertech,*** and ***Weird Science*** entries, and their associated paradigms and instruments, in the ***Practices*** section of **Chapter Ten**.

- • Novice: You understand basic theories of alternative sciences.
- •• Practiced: "Esoterica" is just another word for the obvious.
- ••• Skillful: You can wrap your head around the technological perversions of other groups.
- •••• Expert: Technologies of your foes and rivals dance to the tune you program for them.
- ••••• Master: So rich is your comprehension of the universe that few technologies elude your command.

Possessed By: Mad Scientists, Renegade Technocrats, Visionary Geniuses, Tech-Hackers, Q Division Ops, Design Specialists, Elite Field Ops, Black Suits, Gadgeteers

Suggested Specialties: Hacking-n-Cracking, Improvisation, Repair, Jury-Rigging, Radical Conversions, Weaponsmith, Computers, Microtech, Nanotech, Experimental Theories, Ethertech Theories, Street Mods, Anarchtech

Jetpack

The tricky art of personal flight devices is yours to enjoy. With this Skill, you know how to control body-mounted flying gadgets. Like most tech-based Abilities, your success depends a lot on your familiarity, or lack of it, with the specific kind of tech involved. A Man in Black would have as hard a time with a Son of Ether's jetpack as an Etherite would have with standard-issue NWO gear. Once you've logged some flight-time with a device, however, you're on your way.

- • Novice: "*Oooooooooh, shiii

Torture

Call it "enhanced interrogation" if you like. We all *know* what you really do: You hurt people. Maybe you're "just following orders," or you realize that ticking bombs sometimes require blunt instruments. Perhaps you just plain enjoy it, even if you can't even admit that to yourself. Whatever means you use to justify this skill, you excel at causing mental, physical, and perhaps spiritual distress. This might be part of a religious duty, military service, mystic practice, or god-given prerogative. Then again, you could simply be a sick fuck. Whether said distress involves brutal trauma, exquisite agony, or "simple" emotional manipulation, your skills bring people – perhaps even yourself – to, and perhaps over, the edge of what was once considered endurance.

Even when it's done for "the right reasons," torture presents an *extremely* dicey proposition, especially for an interactive entertainment. Still, it would be dishonest to pretend that certain magicians and operatives *don't* practice excruciation as part of their calling. Many mystic practices include ordeals, self-torment, and even mutilation. Meanwhile, the dreaded techniques of object lessons and secured intelligence feature torture as just another part of the gig. In game terms, this Skill might involve a blackout; if not, the scene should not be treated lightly, or with disrespect toward the feelings of other players. Whatever the context, torture scenes certainly count as mature content. For more on the subject, see ***Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries*** in **Chapter Seven** (p.345), ***Dramatic Feats*** in **Chapter Nine** (p.404), and ***Ordeals and Exertion*** in **Chapter Ten** (p.597).

- • Novice: Playground bully.
- •• Practiced: Bad cop.
- ••• Skillful: Covert ops interrogator.
- •••• Expert: Elite pro dom.
- ••••• Master: Nazi doctor, Spanish Inquisitor, or serial killer.

Possessed By: Enforcers, Gangsters, Spies, Counter-Terrorism Agents, Left-Hand Path Ecstatic Mages and Euthanatos, NWO Operatives, Scary Doctors, Sadists (Safe, Sane, and Otherwise)

Suggested Specialties: Mind Games, Exquisite Techniques, Prolonged Agony, Classical Devices, Sexplay, Self-Torment, Information Retrieval, "Works of Art," Pain – Not Harm

Secondary Knowledges

Knowledge is a mage's best friend. Beyond the core Knowledge Abilities, **Mage** features many types of Knowledge, often tied to specific mystic or technomagickal pursuits. The average person probably hasn't even *heard* of some of these fields of study. To certain Awakened folks, however, the following optional Knowledges can define their Path... or ensure their survival!

Area Knowledge

You know a certain area like the back of your hand. In game terms, choose a particular region (no larger than a city) that your character has a reason to know about. Successful Area Knowledge rolls help you get around, spot shortcuts, and grasp customs, clues, and trivia in ways no outsider could understand.

(**Note:** The ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option does *not* apply to Area Knowledge. To learn a place, you must spend time there.)

- • Dabbler: You've studied up on the area in question.
- •• Student: You've lived there a while.
- ••• Scholar: You've spent lots of time getting to know the local secrets.
- •••• Professor: There's not much about the place you *don't* know.
- ••••• Master: "My city calls me, and I answer..."

Possessed By: Vigilantes, Cops, Crime Bosses, Journalists, Backwoods Legends, Street Folks, Black Suits, Protectors of the People

Suggested Specialties: History, Geography, Wildlife, Politics, Shortcuts, Getaways, Crime, Rumors, Hideouts, Gangs, Information Sources, Well-Hidden Secrets

Belief Systems

You've studied what people believe, how they believe it, why they believe what they do, and – perhaps most importantly – where people tend to hold certain beliefs. Why is this important? Because, when reality is your stock-in-trade, knowing *why*, *how*, and *where* people believe certain things gives you a massive edge when you're trying to suit or change those beliefs.

As a Trait, this Knowledge covers general religious, political, economic, and philosophical belief systems throughout the modern mortal world. The higher your rating is, the more extensive and yet specific your understanding becomes. A single dot confers basic information (*"Many United States citizens tend to be moderately capitalist, with a modern Christian cultural background and a heavy reliance upon mass-media impressions"*), whereas higher ratings reflect increasingly detailed and specific knowledge (*"The San Francisco region comprises extremes of both right- and left-wing American political ideologies, with the dominant religious belief systems encompassing the modern and traditional beliefs of its large Chinese, Indian, and Japanese cultures; traditional and modified Native American belief systems; Mexican Catholicism; moderate Evangelical Protestant Christianity; moderate U.S. Catholicism; postmodern NeoPaganism; and diverse New Age syntheses of pan-cultural magical thinking..."*). This sort of understanding can be extremely helpful when you're crafting coincidental magick, appealing to local traditions, cultivating good impressions, or shifting people's beliefs in your favor.

The Belief Systems Knowledge also helps a mage understand the "reality zones" phenomenon and to turn it to her advantage. See the ***Reality Zones*** section in **Chapter Ten,** (pp. 611-617), for further details.

- • Dabbler: You've gleaned a working knowledge off Wikipedia.
- •• Student: You hold a decent understanding of current religious and cultural beliefs.
- ••• Scholar: You've got a deep comprehension of dominant belief systems worldwide.
- •••• Professor: You're a noted authority on comparative religions and political philosophies.
- ••••• Master: Karen Armstrong fact-checks her books with you.

Possessed By: Journalists, Missionaries, Theologians, Historians, Professors, Pundits, Philosophers, Poli-Sci Scholars, Media Manipulators, Political/Religious Activists, Paradigm-Shifting Mages

Suggested Specialties: Regional Beliefs, Esoterica, Cults, Current Events, Religious/ Political History, Geopolitics, Comparative Religion, Media Manipulation, Belief Trends, Paradigm-Hacking

Cryptography

A world full of secrets is a world filled with codes. You understand how they work, know the principles for crafting and cracking them, and have the kind of mind that curves along the proper corners when hacking various codes. A background in mathematics and historical encryption comes with this Skill, although other Abilities – Linguistics, Esoterica (Alchemy, Bibliomancy, Secret Code Languages, etc.), Science (Mathematics), and so forth – provide invaluable assistance for such tasks. Mages are *really* good at rendering simple things into obscure gibberish, so this is a valuable skill, though not an especially common one.

With this Knowledge, you can create codes that can be broken only by someone who *exceeds* your Cryptography rating with her own Intelligence + Cryptography dice pool. (Someone with a dice pool of at least four dice could beat Cryptography 3, for example, but not Cryptography 4.) You can also try to unravel codes with your own Intelligence + Cryptography rolls. In both cases, the difficulty depends upon the complexity of the code and the obscurity of the elements involved. If the code demands some knowledge that the would-be cracker does not *have*, of course, the code remains unbreakable. Japanese cryptographers, for instance, couldn't have deciphered the Navajo code-talker messages because they didn't even know that the Navajo language *existed*. Even without such knowledge, though, a good roll can help you puzzle out the *foundation* of a code even if you can't read its contents, which is often half the battle.

For rules dealing with codes and decryption, see ***Social Occasions and Intrigue*** in **Chapter Nine**.

- • Dabbler: Spy novel fan.
- •• Student: Military signals engineer.
- ••• Scholar: Intelligence operative.
- •••• Professor: Cipher specialist.
- ••••• Master: Codebuster supreme.

Possessed By: Puzzle Fans, Intelligence Specialists, Spies, Alchemists, Communication Analysts, Insurgents, Counterterrorism Agents

Suggested Specialties: Mathematical Encryption, Secret Languages, Mystical Codes, Occulted Lore, Encryption History, Weird Logic, Computers, Art-History Symbolism

Demolitions

You know how to make things go *BOOM*, usually without blowing yourself to bits in the process. This perilous specialty becomes especially important in the new millennium, when Improvised Explosive Devices are weapons of choice and opportunity. Such Knowledge confers a working familiarity with explosive chemistry and tech, an understanding of common designs, a knack for figuring blast patterns and effects, and – at its higher levels – the expertise to defuse many explosive devices too. What it does *not* do is provide foolproof explosive technology. Once things explode, chaos always takes over.

- • Novice: Model kits, fireworks, and you.
- •• Practiced: Anarchy!
- ••• Skillful: You've trained with explosive compounds, devices, and precautions.
- •••• Expert: "Stand back – I'm a professional."
- ••••• Master: A master of disasters, you can defuse, as well as create, a wide range of explosive devices.

Possessed By: Mythbusters, Terrorists, Counterterrorists, Radicals, Survivalists, Spies, Pyrotechnicians, Military Specialists, YouTube Stars, Kids With More Enthusiasm Than Sense

Suggested Specialties: IEDs, Bomb Disposal, Stage Effects, Fireworks, Car Bombs, Improvised Materials, Magickal Enhancement, Building Demolition, "Watch *This!*"

Finance

Money is the ultimate human magic trick, and you know how it works. Trade, trends, investments, markets, and risks provide you with mental stimulation, Awakened/ Enlightened power, economic fortitude, and – most likely – plenty of money (in game terms, the ***Resources*** Background).

An essential Trait for Syndicate Technocrats, this Knowledge enriches wizards, Adepts, mad scientists, and sharp-witted witches everywhere and provides a key component of the *Ars Cupiditae* – a venerable form magick based upon desire. **(See *The Art of Desire/ Hypereconomics* in Chapter Ten, p.573.)**

- • Dabbler: Smart investor.
- •• Student: Bank employee.
- ••• Scholar: Professional stockbroker.
- •••• Professor: Wall Street wizard.
- ••••• Master: Power behind the throne.

Possessed By: Bankers, Brokers, Tycoons, Executives, Reporters, Accountants, Investors, Wealthy Bastards, Nephandic Corrupters, Captains of Industry, Masters of the Modern World

Suggested Specialties: Stock Markets, Investment Trends, International Trading, Warning Signs, Insider Trading, Laws, Law-Breaking, Black Markets, Currency, Power of Greed, Ars Cupiditae

Lore/ RD Data

You know more about the Night-Folk than they'd appreciate you knowing. Sure, your understanding gets filtered through the lens of your own group's perspective, but it's more than the average person… or mage… comprehends. For mystic mages, such knowledge is considered **Lore**: the hidden secrets of vampires,

werecreatures, and the like. Among Technocrats, it's known as **RD Data**: information about the clandestine affairs of Reality Deviants whose very existence presents a threat to the Consensus.

Different Lore categories include: *Spirits*, *Fae*, *Werecreatures*, *Vampires*, *Ghosts*, *Hunters*, *Demons*, *Mages* (naturally...), and potentially others as well. Each Lore/ RD Data category counts as *a separate Lore specialty*; knowing about Sabbat Kindred won't teach you anything about Seelie Fae Kith. The ***Well-Skilled Craftsman*** option may help you assemble a formidable amount of information about various groups within those categories. Even then, however, your knowledge will be full of holes, misconceptions, prejudices, and lies. These secretive beings don't even have accurate appraisals of *themselves*, so an outsider (especially a Technocratic one) has obvious disadvantages in that regard as well.

Another thing – despite their long rivalries, different mage factions don't often have accurate data about *one another*. A Verbena runecaster might recognize "one of those fucking soulless Technocratic bastards," but he's not likely to know the difference between a Progenitor Genegineer and a Syndicate "magic man"... or to care much about it, either, unless he's got a specialty in Technocracy Lore.

- • Dabbler: They're out there...
- •• Student: You're heard a few names and legends about them.
- ••• Scholar: These entities have distinct social structures, and you've begun to understand what they might be.
- •••• Professor: Although your knowledge is biased by your own perspective, you can tell a Ventrue from a Setite and you've got some idea what that distinction means.
- ••••• Master: You're not supposed to know as much about them as you do... but you do.

Possessed By: Sages, Wizards, Xenobiologists, Black Suits, Witches, Shamans, Field Ops, Adventurers, Emissaries, Strategists, Interrogators, Intelligence Analysts, Monster-Hunters

Suggested Specialties: Infernalists, Marauders, Traditions, Technocracy, Disparates, Faeries, Vampires, Werebeasts, Ghosts, Hunters, Demons, etc.

Media

Mass media is mass reality... and you know how to shape both. The fine art and science of crafting public perception is yours to employ. You know who to call, what to tell them, which strings to pull, and probably how to make a tasty profit off the end result. Although this Trait does not necessarily grant access to high-placed media figures (see the ***Influence*** Background for those kinds of connections), you understand the Mass Media Machine and can guide it to your best advantage.

The ***Dominion***, ***Art of Desire***, and ***Reality-Hacking*** practices often depend upon an understanding of media (see those entries in **Chapter Ten**), and media can even function as an instrument of certain types of magick – see the ***Mass Media*** entry on **(p.594)** for details.

- • Dabbler: Mass-Com major.
- •• Student: Reporter.
- ••• Scholar: Career journalist.
- •••• Professor: Network honcho.
- ••••• Master: Rupert Murdoch.

Possessed By: Writers, Editors, Pundits, Media Flacks, Spin Doctors, Watchdog Advocates, Bloggers, Advertisers, Celebrities, Corrupters, Media Agents, Politicians, Activists, Adbusters, NWO Watchers, Media-Indoctrination Specialists

Suggested Specialties: Spin Control, Politics, Leverage, Slander, Media Law, International Media, Propaganda, Panic, Subversion, Local News, Internet Media, Alternative Sources, Movies, TV, Cable News, Media Consolidation, Top-Down Influence, Entertainment, Advertising, Walking The Line Between Truth And Fiction

Pharmacopoeia/ Poisons

Drugs are your specialty: street drugs, herbal compounds, experimental medications, psychoactives, hypertech concoctions, and the like. You understand the effects of various chemicals on the human animal and perhaps on other animals as well. A specialty of shamans, witches, Progenitors, Ecstatics, alchemists, and other mages who employ pharmaceutical compounds, this Knowledge allows you – with the proper tools, of course – to measure, recognize, analyze, counter, or dose someone with a range of chemicals. As usual, higher ratings reflect greater expertise. You'll never know *everything*, of course, but you're rarely flying blind.

A venerable, if underhanded, magickal tool, the variation Knowledge of **Poisons** allows you to alter the natural chemistry of living things in... shall we say, *unfortunate* ways. Witches, alchemists, assassins, and other shady types are infamous for their expertise with such compounds, and though you might not want to *advertise* that information, you're experienced with such compounds too.

For rules dealing with poisons and intoxication, see ***Drugs, Poisons, and Disease*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 441-444)**.

- • Dabbler: Street dealer.
- •• Student: Pharmacy student or savvy herbalist.
- ••• Scholar: Dr. Timothy Leary.
- •••• Professor: Experienced with mystic, esoteric, and hypertech compounds.
- ••••• Master: Renowned Pharmacopoeist.

Possessed By: Progenitors, Ecstatics, Alchemists, Entheogenic Mystics, Dope Dealers, Vice Cops, Verbena, Interrogators, Corrupters, Party Animals, Mad Scientists, Medical Professionals

Suggested Specialties: Mundane Meds, Hypermeds, Street Drugs, Entheogens, Magical Concoctions, Designer Compounds, Herbal Remedies, Nutritional Supplements, Mood-Altering Drugs

Backgrounds

A measure of resources both internal (Avatar, Arcane, Dream, etc.) and external (Allies, Mentor, Resources, and so on), the Background Trait tells you plenty about a mage's position in life. A charismatic wizard, for instance, would have Allies, Contacts, Influence, and the like, whereas a solitary hermit would possess a strong Avatar, lots of Arcane, and maybe a Familiar or Node. As with other Traits, Backgrounds come from essential elements of that character's history and often play significant roles in the chronicle at hand. When you pick your Backgrounds, then, make sure there are good reasons for the things you choose. Who are your Allies, and why do they aid you? Where's your Node, what's it like, and how did you acquire such a potent treasure? A high Avatar rating reflects an entity with a strong personality and goals of its own; what, then, is your relationship with that internal spirit, and how does that affect your life? Each Trait should have origins, conditions, and a story of its own... at least in regards to its place in your life.

In certain situations, you can roll your Background rating as a dice pool (or part of one) for certain feats. Charisma + Influence, for example, can help you spread a message quickly, and Manipulation + Arcane might help you pull the old "*I'm not the one you're looking for*" trick. Generally, though, your Background ratings reflect *things that are available to you*, not dice you roll to accomplish the average task.

Although your actions affect the power of your Background resources, the Background Trait itself is generally considered to be outside the player's control. Under the original Storyteller rules, you could not raise a Background Trait with experience points, although the Storyteller might raise it for you, in lieu of experience points, to reflect events in the chronicle. **Mage Revised** changed this rule, so the final decision depends on your Storyteller's wishes **(see p. 336.)** Even then, a changed Background generally reflects a change in circumstances. You can try to recruit more Spies or entice more Allies to join your cause, but the exact number of people who do (or don't) flock to your banner depend on the needs of the story, not on the points you spend to boost those Traits.

Background Ratings Over Five

When you've got the resources of a massive organization behind you, or if you've acquired some monumental wealth or influence thanks to your Arts, an inheritance, or some other unusual means, you could exceed the usual Background limits. Such levels of influence are *extremely* rare, the province of the richest and most influential folks on Earth. Syndicate tycoons, heirs of Hermetic wizardry, hackers who own entire IT firms – these sorts of characters *might*, if the Storyteller agrees, purchase Background Traits above the usual level.

Only the Backgrounds noted below can go above the five-dot level. These Backgrounds – *Allies*, *Backup*, *Influence*, *Library*, *Node*, *Resources*, *Requisitions*, and *Spies* – reflect external resources that other Traits cannot match. The other Background Traits *can NOT* go above five; you can't purchase Avatar 6 or Mentor 8.

When listing a Background Trait above 5, simply note the first five dots in the usual place and then either mark the additional dots in the next line under that one, or else write down something like "Resources 7" on your character sheet. As with all other Backgrounds, these high-level Traits are not free. People who own companies, have fortunes, or maintain vast spy networks need to spend a lot of time maintaining those resources... and those who don't soon wind up losing those fortunes to bad luck and untrustworthy subordinates. On a related note, a character needs a really good justification for such opulence. Backgrounds between 6 and 10 reflect vital elements of a character's life.

High-level Backgrounds can seriously unbalance a chronicle. The Storyteller may refuse to let players purchase such expansive Traits at all. Even if he allows those upper levels into play, we *strongly* suggest limiting the nine- and 10-dot ranks to Storyteller characters only. A single character with Resources 10 can buy almost anything or anyone; a mere handful of people on Earth command that kind of wealth, and it's not wise to allow player-run mages to be among them!

Pooling Backgrounds

Cooperation benefits everyone. A team of Technocratic operatives – or, at the Storyteller's discretion, a tight circle of like-minded mystics – can pool certain Background Traits and then share them with the group as a whole. In the case of Technocracy ops, that's a fairly standard procedure; for mystic mages, the group must have a common purpose and a very close connection with one another – say, a witches' coven, an Etherite lab-group, a hacker society, and so forth.

The following Backgrounds can be shared within a single group: *Allies*, *Backup*, *Influence*, *Laboratory*, *Library*, *Mentor*, *Node*, *Patron*, *Resources*, *Requisitions*, *Spies* and *Wonder*. Other backgrounds are too individual to be shared this way. Although mystic mages can pool their Background points toward a common *Chantry*, Technocratic agents are specifically prohibited from doing so. When you're part of that Union, you go where they tell you to go, belong to the group they tell you to belong to, and don't even *think* of establishing your own base of control.

In story terms, the members of the group agree to hold certain assets in common. The group's leader determines who gets what and when, then takes the necessary steps to secure that Background for his group. In game terms:

- The players pool their Background points and then put them into certain Backgrounds that each member of the group can use. These Backgrounds are then listed as Group Assets or Shared Resources on the character sheet of each member of that group.

- If a member of that group quits, dies, or falls out of favor with the group, her Background points are withdrawn from the group's total. She, in turn, loses access to the Group Asset Backgrounds, assuming she's alive to use them. The other members either lose those points permanently or replace them with new points of their own.

- Individual characters may keep a few Background points aside for personal use. If nothing else, each mage in that group should have a point or two in the Avatar/ Genius Background.

- When the group's leader requisitions new gear for his team, the chances of success are based on the team's relationship to its superiors. A hotshot pack of malcontents will have a harder time getting gear than an efficient strike force. The pool may come from membership in a larger group.

- If a specific member of the team tries to "borrow" a Background (see below), that player makes the roll. Failure, however, might affect the team as a whole, which might get the offending agent thrown under the bus for the sake of the group.

- If the group members want to purchase a high-level Background (see ***Background Ratings Over Five***, above), they may do so if the Storyteller agrees. All the points get totaled up, and that Background becomes group property. A team that assembles some really large assets, though, may attract unwanted attention, especially if they belong to the Technocracy. Members of the Union should always remember their place in the greater whole, and vast Resources (other than money among Syndicate operatives) might reflect an unmutual attitude.

Membership Has Its Privileges: Technocratic Backgrounds

Certain Backgrounds, marked with an asterisk (*), are available *only* to members of the Technocratic Union. In order to access them, your character must display loyal and constant devotion to the cause. Erratic or unmutual behavior will also reduce a Technocrat's external Background Traits (Allies, Influence, Resources, etc.); after all, if you don't act trustworthy, you can't expect your superiors to trust you.

Other Background Traits have slightly different forms for Technocratic operatives. Marked with an alternate name on the other side of a slash (like Familiar/ Companion), these Backgrounds function more or less the same way, in game terms, as the mystic option, but are regarded *very* differently by the characters themselves.

Requisitioning, Outsourcing, and Borrowing Backgrounds

Thanks to their involvement with the Technocratic Union, Technocracy operatives enjoy several edges with regards to Background Traits:

- **Outfitting:** Before an assignment, Technocrats usually get outfitted with the essential equipment for that mission. The mission supervisor (that is, the Storyteller) determines what the agents will need, and then gives them the appropriate gear. The agents, of course, do not *own* this gear – it's still property of the Technocratic Union and may be withdrawn at any time. Technocrats who get in hot water with their supervisors often find themselves with crappy gear, inadequate gear, or no gear at all. **(See *The Six Degrees* in Chapter Five, pp.181-182.)** Outfitting typically supplies a character with mundane equipment: guns, cars, communication devices, etc. Complex, advanced, expensive, or illegal gear (military

Optional Rule: Differential Background

To represent a character with several different types of related resources, your group could use *differential Backgrounds*. This *optional rule* lets one player purchase the same Background several times for the same character, with each one reflecting a separate resource.

Under this option, each related Background Trait is defined as a specific group or situation. One set of Contacts, for instance, could be a set of spies in the Vatican, and another represents a bunch of bloggers. The Vatican infiltrators would be Spies • • • (*"a highly secured area"*), whereas the bloggers would be Spies • • (*"various helpful areas"*). Both groups would feed you very different kinds of information and provide separate types of access.

Differentiated Backgrounds can be especially useful if and when one group of resources is compromised or destroyed (say, the Vatican spies get caught), or if your character has several identities (the bloggers know him as their buddy Gethsemane, but the Vatican insiders answer to the mysterious Black Bishop). Shapeshifting mages, or folks working several angles, may have different bank accounts (Resources), Nodes, Allies, or even Familiars. Each one is purchased separately, without any "price breaks." If one Background falls through, however, you can still employ the other.

This rule applies only to Backgrounds where one character could *have* several different related resources. You *cannot* own multiple Avatars, Arcanes, Destinies, Dreams, or Requisitions. You *could*, however, have several Allies, Contacts, Mentors, Libraries, and so forth. In all cases, each Background demands the usual time and attention – a pair of Familiars or Chantries would be pretty challenging to maintain! And yet, for certain characters, this option provides an array of options for an ever-changing world.

hardware, trucks, office space, etc.) often needs to be requisitioned unless the supervisor/ Storyteller considers it to be necessary for the assignment.

- **Requisitioning:** As beneficiaries of the Union's generosity, Technocrats may file a requisition with the appropriate supervisor. If that request is granted, the operative can have – *on a temporary basis* – specialized gear and/ or a Background Trait she doesn't normally possess. In this case, the character *must* have the Requisitions Background; the player justifies the request, in character, to the Storyteller, and then rolls her Requisitions rating. The roll's default difficulty is 7, but it might be lower or higher if the character's in really good (or really poor) standing with her supervisors; if the gear is either easy to come by; or if it is rare, fragile, expensive, and/ or dangerous. A successful roll nets her that gear, a failed roll gets a simple refusal, and a botched roll earns her a chewing-out from the offended supervisor.

- **Outsourcing:** Normally, Technocracy agents can requisition gear that's appropriate to their Convention: a Black Suit gets weapons and surveillance gear, a Void Engineer gets Dimensional Science hypertech – that sort of thing. However, a member of the Syndicate (and *only* a member of the Syndicate) can outsource gear from another Technocracy Convention. Again, the roll's difficulty is 7, modified by the nature of the gear and the standing of the agent requesting it.

- **Borrowing:** A Technocrat with connections can try to get his Ally, Contact, Mentor, or Patron to get the gear for him. In this case, the player rolls the appropriate Background Trait. Again, the difficulty is 7, adjusted for circumstances. A failed roll equals a refusal (which may also damage that relationship), and a botched roll means one or both of the partners gets caught (which will *certainly* damage it). If the borrower succeeds, each success is worth one dot in Requisitions; if he already has that Trait, it adds one dot to his usual rating.

- **Asking Nicely:** In this case, a borrowing Technocrat works his connection with some social finesse. The player roleplays the request and then either makes a social roll (a Social Trait + an Ability, with Traits appropriate to the nature of the request: Manipulation + Politics, Appearance + Seduction, etc.); or else rolls a Social Trait + the appropriate Background Trait (Charisma + Allies, for example). The roll itself depends on what that character's doing to try to work the connection. Using Enlightened Procedures (that is, Sphere magick) to get what you want in this sort of bargain is *extremely* unmutual, with dire consequences to one or both parties if something goes wrong.

- **Stealing:** A stupid and/ or desperate agent might try to "unofficially borrow" gear for the long haul. The Union, though, keeps *very* good track of its resources, and an agent who tries stealing some of it is not long for this world.

The following Backgrounds may be requisitioned, outsourced, or borrowed: *Backup*, *Device*, *Influence*, *Library*, *Node*, *Resources*, and *Spies*. All other Traits imply a personal connection to the Background in question. In no cases do the requested Traits become that character's property. They need to be returned – in good working order – at the end of a mission.

Although a non-Technocrat might try borrowing a Background Trait from another non-Technocrat (the usual limits apply), no agent of the Union would *ever* lend Union gear to a Reality Deviant. Beyond the horrific consequences of getting caught doing that, the idea would completely go against a Technocrat's grain. Sure, that crazy death-mage has his uses as cannon-fodder, but would you *really* trust such a lunatic with a Consensual Hallucination Generator? Never.

Resource Forfeiture

The downside of these expansive policies is simple: What is given can be taken away. A character or group that acts recklessly, dishonorably, or suspiciously can have its Background Traits rescinded. In this case, the Storyteller takes the Backgrounds away – possibly after a trial, sham or otherwise, maybe not. Aside from personal Backgrounds – Cloaking, Destiny, Genius, and Hypercram – a Technocrat's Backgrounds ultimately belong to the Union, not to the individual. Wise Technocrats behave themselves... or else.

The following Background Traits can be taken away at the supervisor's command: *Allies*, *Backup*, *Enhancement*, *Influence*, *Mentor*, *Patron*, *Requisitions*, *Resources*, *Secret Weapon*, *Spies*, and *Wonder*. *Companions* and *Contracts* can be neutralized (read: kidnapped or killed) as well, and access to a *Construct*, *Laboratory*, *Library*, or *Node* can be restricted or denied. In short, then, a Technocratic character has both huge advantages and a massive disadvantage; she can request things far above her usual capacity, but those things can removed from her reach if she gets out of line. Thus, both juicy carrots and pointy sticks are used to control a Technocrat's behavior, assuring compliance, loyalty, and dedicated service.

For more information about resource forfeiture, see ***Failure to Comply***, ***The Six Degrees,*** and ***Rewards of Service*** in **Chapter Five**, **(pp. 181-183)**.

Background Traits

As mentioned above, the Technocracy defines certain Traits differently than mystic mages do. And although members of the Traditions share a lot of common terms, mystic mages and technomancers who belong to different groups – or to no group at all – might define their Backgrounds by Technocratic standards (say, a Companion, not a Familiar) rather than by the usual Tradition labels or ideas. As usual, concept guides definition: a Bata'a priestess is more likely to see her Avatar as an aspect of the Loa, whereas a self-Awakened computer geek is liable to see his Enlightened Self as a blazing spark of Genius.

Allies

In times of need, you've got folks who've got your back. These allies might be badass friends, helpful animals, people

with connections they can work in your favor, errand-runners, or maybe even minor spirits who'll lend you the occasional favor if and when they feel like doing so. Generally, this Background refers to unAwakened humans or fairly intelligent animals (like a wolf pack or a troupe of apes). They're probably aware of the weirder side of your life, but they don't know the details of mage society or your true powers unless you choose to endanger them by sharing those secrets. Whatever their nature, or their relationship to you, these allies are characters in their own right, with needs, fears, motivations, and agendas that might coincide with your mage's goals but also may occasionally clash with them.

Each dot in this Background gives you one ally with some moderately useful abilities, or two allies who essentially run errands and do busywork. At two dots and above, you can increase the ability of your moderate allies or buy a larger number of lesser and moderate allies. If you get two dots, for example, you could select two moderate allies, get four sidekicks, or make a single major ally who's more capable than those lesser ones. Magick-using Allies count as major ones. If your allies get killed or wind up quitting your company some other way, this Background loses the dots that represented those characters until you recruit new allies to replace the departed ones.

In certain cases, this Background may go higher than five dots – see **Background Traits Over Five,** (p. 301). For an array of characters, see **Appendix I**.

X	No allies who'd help you in times of need.
•	One ally of moderate power, or two minor sidekicks.
••	Two moderate allies, four sidekicks, or a single, more powerful one.
•••	Three moderate allies, or a combination of lesser and greater ones.
••••	Four moderate allies, six minor sidekicks, or a combination of all three types.
•••••	Five moderate allies, or an assortment of lesser and greater ones.
••••• •	Six moderate allies, a small gang of sidekicks, or one or two really powerful friends.
••••• ••	Seven moderates, a staff of sidekicks, or a handful of strong companions.
••••• •••	Eight moderates, a bunch of followers, or a few major badasses.
••••• ••••	Nine moderates, a private militia, or a pack of major friends.
••••• •••••	Tencapable allies, a small army, or a truly deadly gang.

Alternate Identity

Sometimes you've gotta be ready to disappear. Especially for shapechangers, clones, or people in dangerous professions

(spies, informers, assassins, etc.), the ability to adopt alternate identities can mean the difference between a new life and an unmarked grave. With this Background, you can duck behind a fake identity; the higher the rating, the more support you have for that identity's existence. Each dot in Alternate Identity provides a certain level of official recognition that stands up to increasing degrees of scrutiny. A cheap fake ID could get you past a bouncer, but it won't fool the Highway Patrol!

By itself, an alternate identity is useful but not extremely so. You can use a new ID for a short time, but that'll leave you starting fresh unless you're planning to rebuild your life from scratch. Other Background Traits, however, can be linked to an alternate identity; you won't be able to get a new Avatar, of course, but you might have Allies, Resources, Spies, and so on that are connected to that new you. For each dot in the Alternate Identity Background, you may add one dot's worth of other Background Traits to your other self. You'll still need to pay points for those Backgrounds, of course – they don't come free with this Trait. Still, if and when you need to ditch your previous identity, you could have new resources waiting for you. (See the sidebar ***Differential Backgrounds*** for more details.)

Strong IDs stand up to close observation. To penetrate an alternate identity, a character would need to roll a Mental Trait + Investigation against a difficulty of your Alternate Identity + 3. You can purchase this Trait several times in order to reflect a set of alternate IDs. Even so, you should use some form of magick or disguise to provide distinct appearances for your different identities. Sure, your driver's license might read "Jane Palmer," but if you still look, act, and sound like Eva Morrissey, you'll probably be recognized as the latter.

X You're just you.

• A fake driver's license that kinda looks like you.

•• A passable fake ID, plus a few supporting documents.

••• Respectable identification papers and support documents that'll pass casual inspection.

•••• An established alternative identity.

••••• A fully supported identity with complete history, support documents, witnesses, fake family photos, alternate homes and so on.

Arcane/ Cloaking

You know the fine art of disappearing. Whether this involves a not-so-simple trick, the ability to cloud men's minds, nanotech sensory disrupters, or some nameless power of obscurity, you possess a talent for getting lost. Especially in the age of cell-phone cameras, global databases, electronic trackers, DNA samples, and Closed Circuit TV monitors on every corner, Arcane – or its Technocratic version, **Cloaking** – is a useful Trait to have. Records get lost; cameras malfunction or record fuzzy images in your place; folks recall "Some *guy*... or girl, I guess – I'm really not sure." Although this talent isn't invisibility *per se*, it helps you blend in with crowds, blurs your features on camera, and allows you to slide in between the cracks of an increasingly monitored world.

To mystic mages, Arcane is a bending of reality caused by fluctuations of metaphysical energy, like echoes or Resonance. As far as the Technocracy's concerned, this is a perfectly explainable phenomenon... and they'll get back to you with a reasonable explanation as soon as one meets the rigid criteria for disbursed information. The Union prefers to keep track of mysterious individuals, like Secret Agent John Courage, who manifest this Cloaking effect; doing so, however, is easier declared than achieved.

Game-wise, you add your Arcane/ Cloaking dots as extra dice on all Stealth-related rolls. Your opponents reduce their Perception or Investigation dice pools by that same amount whenever someone tries to track you down. This benefit lasts for as long as you remain inconspicuous. In combat, folks can see you normally, although videos or pictures of that fight remain blurred. A Cloaked character who runs around shouting and being obvious *will* be obvious, although witnesses will probably disagree about his exact description after the event has passed. The Arcane/ Cloaking effect does *not* conceal really memorable features. A purple-haired dude with facial tattoos is going to get noticed, although folks may disagree about the shade of purple or the patterns of his tattoos.

X You're as obvious as anybody else.

• You blend into crowds.

•• Your presence slides out of memory.

••• You're that person no one easily recalls.

•••• Records, pictures, even memories of you are few and hard to find.

••••• You're like a ghost in this world, known only to the folks you want to trust.

Avatar/ Genius

Awakening defines the mage. Whether she refers to it as some mystic inner god or the scientifically explainable Enlightenment of higher consciousness, the Avatar or Genius allows a willworker to do the things she does. Some Avatars, though, are more potent and effective than others. This Trait measures your Awakened self, reflects its ability to shift and hold Quintessence, and determines how real it is in your character's perceptions.

Every mage character has an Avatar of some kind; unless you purchase at least one dot in this Trait, however, your ability to actually *do* much with your magick is extremely limited. Although your magick-casting rolls are based on *Arete*, not the Avatar, your character won't be able to use Quintessence to aid her spells. A mage's ability to absorb or employ Quintessence is based on the Avatar Trait. **(See the *Quintessence Trait* entry, pp.331-333.)** Her higher self, too, is weak – more of an ember than a bonfire. A high Avatar/ Genius rating, though, reflects a higher self whose distinct personality seems very real to the mage in question.

X An ephemeral Avatar hardly capable of magick.

• A notable presence that lets you absorb or expend one point of Quintessence.

••	A dynamic presence that lets you absorb or expend two points of Quintessence.
•••	A discernable entity that lets you absorb or expend three points of Quintessence.
••••	A potent spirit that lets you absorb or expend four points of Quintessence.
•••••	A powerful force of Enlightenment that lets you absorb or expend five points of Quintessence.

Backup

You can call in the cavalry and expect help when needed... in a limited capacity, anyhow. Thanks to your membership in some organization, you're able to request Backup and have a small team of useful folks swoop in and take care of business. Unlike Allies, these people are largely faceless, have limited skills, and are more or less expendable. Essentially, they come in to handle simple tasks, then disperse back to the organization to which you all belong.

Backup characters come from a large pool of skilled but unAwakened personnel. Their relationship to the player characters is pretty much a matter of convenience, with no special loyalty attached. Though they might risk their lives on the mage's behalf, the help's not personal. These folks are just doing their job.

Backup tends to arrive as a pack of gun-wielding grunts who rush in to cover a mage's escape. Any major tasks (or sacrifices) are the mage's responsibility – the backup's not there to handle much heavy lifting. In other situations, the Background can represent other types of support personnel: receptionists, students, roadies, drivers, medics, even prostitutes. A King or Queen of the Jungle might be able to holler for assistance and attract an appropriate group of animals, assuming that character has a story-based reason for such loyalty. The type of aid will depend on the organization, the situation, and the mage's role within that group. An Ecstatic rock star could call in hookers and roadies, whereas a Black Suit might bring in cops, reporters, or a cleanup crew. And though it's easy to dismiss the importance of students, receptionists, or bloggers, it's also worth remembering that society at large depends more upon information than upon violence. One eloquent reporter can do more, in the grand scheme of things, than a dozen dudes with guns.

Typical Backup personnel have Traits in the 1-3 range, with one or two notable Skills. Animals are small (birds, rats, bats, domestic dogs or cats, etc.), and spirits are minor single-purpose entities (fetch spirits, breeze elementals, and so forth). More elite Backup agents – mercenaries, ninja, cyborgs, minor spirits, or large predatory animals, for example – cost twice as much as typical agents but have Traits in the 3-5 range, unusual abilities, or serious combat potential. Essentially, these elite "temp" agents become Allies for the course of a single mission and then disappear back to wherever it is they came from.

In order to get this Background, a character *must* be part of a larger organization – a gang, the police, an armed services division, the Technocracy, and so forth. Whatever his connection to that group might be, the mage needs to fulfill occasional duties on behalf of the group that sends assistance. If he doesn't keep his end of the bargain, if his Backup tends to suffer heavy casualties, or if he otherwise abuses the agents and their group, this Background may be reduced or withdrawn.

Sample Backup teams, and the types of mages they support, include:

- **All:** Students, drivers, receptionists, couriers, lab techs, political activists, merchants, manual laborers, EMTs, cult members, thugs.
- **Agents of Authority:** Cops and detectives, military personnel, reporters, EMTs, cleanup crews.
- **Celebrities:** Fans, roadies, personal assistants, photographers, road-crew, journalists, makeup artists.
- **Clergy:** Acolytes, lesser and lay clergy, healers, devotees of your religion.
- **Cyborgs:** Mechanics, technicians, soldiers, cybernetic "temps".
- **Feral folk:** Animals, healers, medicine people, tribal elders, natives of the appropriate region.
- **Gangsters and Vigilantes:** Gang members, hookers, allied cops, street people, junkies, journalists, petty crooks.
- **Hackers:** Technicians, bloggers, hacker "temps," political activists, anarchists, transhumanists, IT specialists.
- **Martial artists:** Healers, philosophers, martial arts students, "temp" fighters, devotees of your spiritual path.
- **Ritual magicians:** Occultists, cultists, acolytes, academics, fearful assistants, aspiring apprentices, minor imps, or spirit "temps."
- **Scholars:** Research assistants, librarians, bloggers, academics, former students, grad students.
- **Scientists:** Techs, research aides, robots, misshapen or enhanced assistant "temps."
- **Shamans:** Devotees, minor spirits, animals, activists, or armed defenders of your culture.
- **Spies and Assassins:** Informants, gang members, sleeper agents, cleanup crews.
- **Subculturists:** Artists, neotribalists, musicians, healers, bloggers, psychoactive specialists, badasses from your subculture.
- **Tycoons:** Corporate subordinates, flunkies, toadies, office personnel, journalists, security guards.
- **Witches:** Animals, devotees, New Agers, Pagan activists, healers, minor spirits.

This Background may go higher than five dots – see (p. 301). For sample Backup characters and animals, see **Appendix I**, (pp. 618-639).

X	You're on your own, kid!
•	Two typical agents.
••	Four basic agents or two skilled "temps."
•••	Six agents.
••••	Eight agents or four "temps."
•••••	10 agents.
••••• •	12 agents or six "temps."
••••• ••	14 agents.
••••• •••	16 agents or eight "temps."
••••• ••••	18 agents.
••••• •••••	20 agents, or 10 "temps."

Blessing

Someone out there has left its mark on you. That mark is usually beneficial, but it comes with uncanny side effects. Maybe you always find a few extra bucks when you need them but get stuck with the check when you grab some drinks with the girls. Perhaps you're lucky in lust but can't find a lasting partnership. This Background gives you a minor perk at the cost of a related quirk.

In game terms, Blessings gives you a single, minor, story-based benefit. This benefit seems to come from an element in your character history, one that's tied into the beliefs that focus your magick. An Akashic, for example, could consider herself blessed by the wind-god Fei Lian because she's always cooled by a faint breeze; a Sister of Hippolyta never gets lost (a blessing of Athena), whereas a one-eyed Syndicate boss with an unsettling sense of physical and energetic androgyny also seems to know little things no one should know about. (No one actually *calls* the boss Odin, but that picture of two ravens on the boss's wall hints at a certain familiarity...)

At the same time, this benefit seems a little... *weird*. Why's there a breeze blowing inside this locked apartment? How'd you *know* your way through this maze? Is that boss "him"... or "her"... or... um, I think I'll just call them "*Boss*." This sense of oddness could be considered a constant bit of Resonance, a wink from your patron god, a quirk of localized reality-streams, or whatever else seems appropriate. The obvious explanation is that it's a sign of the figure who blessed you, but that sort of thing doesn't happen in the *real* world, does it?

Like the Dream, Legend, Past Life, and Totem Backgrounds below, Blessings ties your mage into forces greater than himself. Although those forces, in your mage's mind, appear to stem from his deeply-held beliefs (and thus might be a latent form of uncontrolled magick), they remain ultimately mysterious. Odin won't be showing up at that boss's door saying, "*Hey, guess who made you androgynous*," though certain story-based quirks might make the answer obvious to someone familiar with Norse mythology. (The raven picture, the one eye, the way crows always fly past when the boss goes for a walk, that sort of thing.) The character might not admit that he or she believes in the Blessing ("*Old Viking gods? Ridiculous!*"), but there's a lingering connection that runs deeper than anyone suspects. (The boss still recalls that Norse mythology book from third grade rather fondly...)

In game terms, choose one non-combat, story-based ability that blesses your character with an unusual talent. The higher the rating, the more useful that talent becomes. Contrary to the original Blessings entry in **Guide to the Traditions**, this talent is *NOT* chosen from among Sphere Effects, Merits, or Flaws; instead, it's a minor twist of fate that influences the character's life in story terms – see the examples below. (That Blessings Background – an open-ended set of superpowers with conflicting causes, effects and systems – has been revised for this edition.)

Your Blessings talent must follow certain guidelines:

- It's based in the character's beliefs about the world – in short, his magickal paradigm.
- It's tied into your mage's personal history, probably somewhere in her childhood.
- It's connected to a potent supernatural/ mythic/ paranormal figure of some kind – a god, a hero, an archetype, a Fae queen – whose favor fits your character concept.
- It *does not* influence combat, except perhaps in a roundabout way (your knives remain sharp, you always have one bullet left in the chamber, your punches have movie-like sound effects, and so forth).
- It does not influence magick casting rolls either. Although a Blessing may influence the character's choice of Spheres and should be tied into his focus, it *will not* alter the difficulty for Arete rolls when casting spells.
- It's not an obvious display of inhuman or impossible phenomena (no flight, iron skin, fiery hands, and so forth) and might have a rational, scientific explanation.
- It has a corresponding weird quirk, also story-based, with effects that follow or mirror the Blessing (the odd breeze, one eye and an affinity for ravens, a tendency to always scramble directions even though you never get lost, etc.).
- If the character breaks faith with her apparent patron – say, by a grave insult or religious conversion – then the Blessing disappears. (Gods *hate* ingratitude...)

These Blessings share a clear connection to the figure who apparently favors your character: a dude blessed by Pan always goes home with the best-looking woman (or man) in the club, even though he's kinda hairy and has a powerful smell; the woman blessed by Allah has a knack for improvised poetry, yet never writes any of it down; that chick blessed by the Lady of the Lake always carries sharp knives... and she really enjoys swimming; that guy nicknamed "Lucifer"? Well, he's not *actually*

a devil or anything, but he seems to be able to talk folks into *anything*... and doesn't his skin seem a little... *red*...?

Blessings are not infallible. In high-stakes situations, the blessed character may still need to roll for success. If, for instance, the Lucifer guy wants to talk an important character into some truly crazy scheme, his player has to roll for it. In such rolls, the Storyteller deducts one level of difficulty per dot in this Background from the usual difficulty of the task. Our Lucifer guy, for instance, has Blessings 4, and so subtracts -4 from the difficulty of his roll. Again, a Blessing *does not* affect combat actions or magick-casting rolls, so it *does not alter* such rolls.

As suggested earlier, this Background fits well with Destiny, Legend, Past Life, and most especially Totem. The Storyteller has the final say about the Blessing's effects and manifestations and may veto a Blessing that doesn't fit her chronicle, seems too powerful, or tilts the game too far in that character's favor.

X No figure favors you.

• Life gives you small favors: your clothes always look clean and pressed, your kitchen never gets filthy, you find dollar bills on the ground, etc.

•• Little things go your way: You always find a parking space, win small amounts whenever you play the lottery, score someone's phone number whenever you ask for it, etc.

••• You possess a strange affinity for certain things: your cooking always tastes good, you never get lost or lose your keys, babies fall asleep as soon as you start rocking them, etc.

•••• Your knack gets downright uncanny: kids shut up as soon as you tell them to, your suggestions always sound reasonable, you score with whomever appeals to you, etc.

••••• A major blessing follows you: your wallet and bank account always have one dollar left, your gun has one final bullet, you know secrets no one should be able to know about, etc.

Certification

In an age when you need permits for every damn thing imaginable, the right certifications can save you a world of aggravation. With this Background, your character has official papers that allow her to pursue some regulated activity: hunting, driving, operating heavy machinery, practicing medicine, owning certain weapons, and so on. Generally, such activities involve risk, demand special training, affect society at large, or a combination of the three. Simple certifications, like a fishing permit, are easy to obtain, whereas really hazardous or complex activities demand higher levels of certification.

Unless your character has managed to obtain a permit without the proper training, you'll need at least one dot in a related Ability for each dot in this Background; a medical license, for example, would demand at least four dots in Medicine. Assuming that your character has the appropriate skills (or has paid the appropriate bribes), you can get certifications for alternate identities (see ***Alternate Identity***, above) to reflect a character with the right papers under various names.

Official certifications carry a degree of visibility. Certifications can be checked by the authorities, and although a heavy-weapons permit might let you own some serious hardware, it also assures that you'll be one of the first people the cops look for when someone commits a crime with such weaponry!

X The usual stuff – driver's license, government ID card, nothing special.

• Hunting license, business license, passport to an open country, etc.

•• Teaching certificate, bodywork license, PADI certification, CPA, trucker's or motorcycle license, basic firearms permit, etc.

••• Concealed weapons permit, HAZMAT disposal license, church-ordained clergy, lifeguard certification, private investigator's license, private pilot's permit, etc.

•••• Class C weapons permit, board-certified medical or legal professional, professional aircraft pilot's license, government intelligence operative, etc.

••••• Diplomatic immunity, license to kill.

Chantry/ Construct

In the hazardous world of the Awakened, it's always a good idea to have some like-minded associates and a stronghold with some fair security. Since the Golden Age of Wizardry, such places have been called *Covenants*: centers where a group of allied mages stake out territory, consolidate resources, and agreed to assist and defend one another when need be. In later years, the Order of Reason adopted that idea and built the Technocratic Union around that principle. By the 20th century, Tradition mages call those places *Chantries*, the Union calls them *Constructs*, and other mages call them by whatever sounds like a culturally appropriate name (temple, lodge, mosque, etc.).

In game terms, a Chantry or Construct is a base of operations. A character with this Background belongs to such a base and has certain benefits from, and responsibilities to, the group that maintains that base. Most Technocratic agents belong to a Construct by default – that's just how the Union operates. Mystic mages have a more of a choice about such things, but many of them belong to Chantries as a matter of practicality. There *is* strength in numbers, after all.

Because **Mage**'s character-creation rules assume that beginning characters are new to the Awakened game, a character with this Background begins as a low-ranking member of an established stronghold. She gets the benefit of a belonging to a group of older and more experienced peers (who are probably Storyteller-run characters), but starts off at the bottom of the pecking order too. The elders have her doing errands and chores around the Chantry, and she lacks political clout within the group. Growing beyond that stage is one of the keys to a young mage's journey.

A group of mystic mages can also create their own Chantry, an option that's not open to Technocratic operatives. (The

Union frowns on such individualism.) By pooling points among the members, the group can assemble the resources necessary to build a place of its own. In game terms, these construction points reflect time, money, favors, labor, and other things spent in the process of establishing the stronghold. (A point-based building system was included in **The Book of Chantries**, but that system has since been discarded.) The more points the group assembles, the larger the Chantry can become.

Secure Squat	10-20 point pool
Small Sanctuary	21-30 point pool
Mystic Chantry	30-70 point pool
Stronghold	71-100 point pool
Power Center	101+ point pool

A Chantry or Construct can take whatever form seems appropriate. One might be a rural woodland grove; another could be an abandoned movie theater; a third may be a secluded mad laboratory; and a fourth sets up shop in an office building, Viking longhouse, law firm, or machine shop. Low-level Chantries and Constructs have a few mundane resources – some magickal wards, a security system, perhaps a handful of unAwakened aides, communication services, and so forth. At the *Mystic Chantry* level, the place can get a few paranormal trappings: scrying pools, portals to Horizon Realms, spirit guardians, that sort of thing. *Strongholds* and *Power Centers* have extensive mundane and magickal/ hypertech resources; such places should be hashed out in detail with the Storyteller and demand huge investments of time, power, labor, and materials.

The stability of this pool depends on the continued cooperation and survival of the contributors. If a mage quits or gets killed, his points are lost. If the entire group fractures, all points are lost and the Chantry dissolves. Surviving members might pool some experience points and make up the difference for the lost contribution. Otherwise, that Chantry joins the many broken fellowships and strongholds sprinkled throughout mage history.

Incidentally, other Backgrounds that are connected to the Chantry must be purchased separately. The following Backgrounds may be added to a Chantry: *Allies*, *Arcane*, *Backup*, *Cult*, *Familiar*, *Influence*, *Library*, *Mentor*, *Node*, *Patron*, *Retainers*, *Resources*, *Spies*, and *Wonder*. For details about combining Background points toward a shared Background Trait, see ***Pooling Backgrounds***, (pp.301-302).

X No place to call home.

•• One pool point or membership in a tiny Squat.

•••• Two pool points or membership in a small Sanctuary.

••••• • Three pool points or membership in an average Chantry or Construct.

••••• ••• Four pool points or membership in a Stronghold.

••••• ••••• Five pool points or membership in a Power Center.

Contacts

You know people who know things. Although such contacts aren't as helpful or reliable as Allies, they can help you dig up information, spread messages, pull strings, and call in small favors (scoring tickets to a sold-out concert, locating a low-rent apartment, getting a meeting with the police chief, and so on). Naturally, these folks will want occasional help from you as well. So long as one hand washes the other, though, these folks can prove remarkably helpful.

The nature of your Contacts Background depends upon your character's concept and backstory. The runaway Jinx, for example, would have contacts among the street-folk community, whereas executive Malcolm has contacts in the business world. Within their area of experience, contacts can usually find or pass on appropriate sorts of information; Jinx might learn how to hotwire a car, and Malcolm might secure data about automotive stocks, but Neither Jinx nor Malcolm is likely to know someone who could trace a car's license plate number. If you're looking for contacts outside your area of expertise, you could always nurture some new ones, or else you could use your existing contacts to find out what you need. (In game terms, this second option raises the difficulty of your roll by +2 or more.)

When calling on your contacts, roll an appropriate Social Attribute + Contacts. The difficulty depends on the nature of the information you're trying to circulate or the favor you're trying to get. Success gets you what you needed, but failure reflects flawed data, a mangled message, or no benefit at all. A botch means you've pissed somebody off; either your contact sells you out or else tells you to go to hell and then removes herself from your network for a while.

Each dot in this Trait reflects one major Contact, a fleshed-out character like an Ally. You could also establish casual contacts with a successful Social or Mental Trait + Contacts roll, but these sources will be harder to work with (that is, the roll has a higher difficulty) and they're not reliable with sensitive information.

This Background can go above five dots. For information networks that deal in sensitive or secret information, see the Background: ***Spies***.

X Nope – it's all on you.

• One contact.

•• Two contacts.

••• Three contacts.

•••• Four contacts.

••••• Five contacts.

••••• • Six contacts.

••••• •• Seven contacts.

••••• ••• Eight contacts.

••••• •••• Nine contacts.

••••• ••••• 10 contacts.

Cult

Any mage with charisma can have friends; this Cult, however, goes beyond mere friendship. These devotees trust and revere you so deeply that, when gathered and directed, they can lend their beliefs to your rituals.

The nature of your cult isn't important. You might be a religious figure with a congregation, an artist with especially devoted fans, a professor whose students literally revere him, or any other similar arrangement. What matters is the *belief*: your cult accepts you as someone who works wonders, and they want to be part of that magic... and so they are.

As detailed under ***Allies, Assistants, and Cults*** and ***Acting in Concert*** **(Chapter Ten, p. 532 and pp. 542-543)**, a group of assistants who share a common belief add to the caster's dice pool in a ritual cast with their help. Such rituals can involve either mystic Arts or technomagick, *so long as everyone participates*. In most cases, all characters involved must occupy the same physical space during the ritual; a potential exception could be made for a networked group linked by Mind magick or conference technology (a LAN party, video conference, and so forth). Again, though, the helpers must hold absolute conviction and be free – at least for the moment – from outside distractions.

Cult members are typical Sleepers: not especially skillful or accomplished beyond their utter faith in you. Powerful helpers are Allies, Backup, Retainers, or other major characters. These people, though, have some vital reason to believe in what you do. On your end, then, you must fulfill their trust. If you want their trust, then at least *appear* to be the person they expect you to be. If their faith wavers, then you lose this Background's benefits.

It's possible to have a larger cult, of course – a popular evangelist might have hundreds of devotees. After a certain point, though, they can help you only so much. The five-dot rank in this Background offers the maximum benefit for a cult.

X	No cult.
•	Tiny cult: 3-7 people. Add one die to the dice pool of a ritual cast with that group's assistance.
••	Small cult: 8-12 people. Add two dice to rituals cast when that group is gathered.
•••	Moderate cult: 13-17 people. Add three dice to rituals cast in the presence of the whole group.
••••	Large cult: 18-22 people. Add four dice to rituals cast with that group behind them.
•••••	Huge cult, between 23-30 people. Add five dice to rituals cast when the entire cult has gathered.

Demesne

A mage's mind is her castle. There, she can get away from it all to a world of her own making. Classical and

Renaissance treatises refer to *memory palaces*, wherein a person builds a structure in her mind as an aid to meditation, study, reflection, and, of course, memory. Shaped from the builder's consciousness, these constructs have no physical form, yet they offer a type of refuge. With this Background, you have such a place.

Cosmologically, a Demesne exists in the Maya as a semi-permanent Dream Realm inspired by your dreaming mind. This Realm might be something you created intentionally with the Talent: ***Lucid Dreaming***, or it might exist in a place conjured by your subconscious imagination. Either way, it follows cues from your consciousness and features elements of personal significance for you. Your mind might build a temple that no one can defile, a field of flowers in honor of your beloved, a gallery of pictures that immortalize people or places you wish to remember... if you can *dream* it, you can *create* it... though you might not actually control your creation once the Demesne exists.

This Demesne might not be a pleasant place. Nightmares, Quiets, suicidal thoughts, or other dark neuroses can spawn a Demesne too. Maybe you *want* to craft a nightmare realm, either a testing-ground, a purgatory, or a reflection of your love for horror films. Pleasant or otherwise, the Demesne could be small, impressive, or vast. You yourself might not know just *how* expansive it can be. Our minds, after all, are full of surprises...

In game terms, the Background rating reflects the degree of control you have over this place once it's established. At low ratings, you can visit the Realm but not command it, while at higher levels you determine almost every detail of your Realm. **(Again, see the *Lucid Dreaming* entry, p. 294.)** Figure out your Demesne's appearance and nature, probably in collaboration with your Storyteller... who's bound to add a few elements of her own.

When dreaming or meditating, your character can go visit his Demesne with a successful Perception + Demesne roll. The difficulty depends upon your situation: directing yourself there under normal circumstances would be difficulty 5 or 6, whereas trying to reach it under distressing circumstances (say, while enduring torture or other challenges) would range from difficulty 7 to 9. Once he's arrived, the character's consciousness is free to wander around the Demesne. Although physical or mental distress can disrupt the Realm, it's still a familiar – if not always welcoming – space.

There's nothing physical about a Demesne. You don't go there physically, and you cannot take anything physical from that Realm. Instead, a traveler sends his astral form into that Demesne, leaving his body behind. For details, see ***Astral Travel*** in **Chapters Four** and **Nine**, **(p. 87)** and **(pp. 476-478)**. That said, you don't need Mind 3 or better to enter your personal Demesne – the Background Trait takes care of the travel arrangements. A mage who *can* travel astrally, though, may wander out of the Demesne and reach other Dream or Astral Realms from there.

In the Demesne, your appearance reflects your state of mind. If you're calm, you're lucid dreaming, or have managed to project your ideal astral form, you look however you want to look. Under other circumstances, your visiting form might betray whatever stress, fear, or insecurities you're facing in the physical world. A successful Wits + Demesne (or Lucid Dreaming) roll lets you adjust your appearance at that point, though... and similar rolls can help you change the dreamscape too. Large changes, of course, demand several successes – see above for potential difficulties.

Because the Demesne itself reflects its creator's mental state, you can also confront internal issues within the Dream Realm's boundaries. A successful Perception + Demesne roll allows you to puzzle out subconscious conflicts and figure out what's going on beneath the surface. On a related note, you can try to access memories that might be hidden throughout the Demesne. In this case, roll Intelligence + Meditation or Demesne (whichever is higher), with the difficulty and numbers of successes based upon the obscurity of that information. The name of your last girlfriend would be easy to find, but the name of the kid who sat next to you in third grade would be significantly harder to recall.

A skillful Mind mage (that is, Mind 3 for a sleeping subject, Mind 4 for one who's awake) can draw other people's consciousness into his Demesne too. If that person doesn't *want* to enter the Demesne, they have a Willpower-versus-Willpower contest **(see *Resisted Actions* in Chapter Eight, p. 390)**, with the winner achieving his objective. A person who's fighting the dream can roll every few turns to leave the Demesne; until the roll succeeds, however, that character is trapped. Again, this is not a *physical* trap, though being stuck in someone else's nightmare can be pretty horrifying...

If your mage falls into a Quiet, you can roll his Willpower (difficulty 9) in order to go into your Demesne; there, he's *still* trapped in the mindscape, but at least it's familiar territory. A few successful Perception + Demesne rolls could lead him back out again. See ***Quiet*** in **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 554-561)**.

X	No Dream Realm to speak of.
•	Occasional visitor to the Realm. You have a name for it and recognize a few significant features.
••	A regular visitor, you've traveled extensively through the Demesne.
•••	In your dreams, you know this place quite well.
••••	This is *your* Realm, and though you don't command its every feature or resident, they know and recognize you as someone of authority there.
•••••	Lord or Lady of the Demesne, you know and command this Realm as if it were your kingdom... because it *is*.

Destiny

You're a Chosen One, destined to play a vital role in the cosmic drama. Prophecies hint at your coming greatness; statistical analysis points toward your significance. Most importantly, *you* know you're fated to be special. When things seem bleak, you can call upon this knowledge to get you through.

Once per game session, you can call upon this sense of destiny if you're facing a tough challenge or a tight spot. If you've spent all of your Willpower points before this crisis, you can roll your Destiny dice pool against difficulty 8. Each success you roll allows you to instantly regain a point of Willpower. With that restored confidence, you can cheat defeat or death, living another day to achieve Fate's plans for you.

At some point, however, you will finally face your final destiny. On that day, the Storyteller declares, "*It's your Moment of Destiny. Face THIS crisis on your own!*" At that point, you're out of special rolls. Whatever Fate has in store for you, it's up to you to fulfill that destiny. If you happen to survive that encounter and achieve something memorable, this Background goes away, perhaps to be replaced by another Background (Storyteller's option) that reflects the dramatic change of life you've endured. If you fail, you get stuck with the knowledge that Destiny came calling and you weren't up to the task.

X You're not especially important.
• A minor destiny; roll one die.
•• You're significant; roll two dice.
••• You're important; roll three dice.
•••• You're destined for great things; roll four dice.
••••• Someday soon, you'll be a legend; roll five dice.

Dream/ Hypercram

Knowledge is everything to a mage. Being the conduits to cosmic consciousness that they can be, certain mages are able to access information that they have not personally studied or practiced. After taking a bit of time to meditate (or, in the case of Technocrats and other scientifically-minded willworkers, to **Hypercram**), such mages can temporarily tap into the wealth of knowledge and experience that's out there, channeling Ability Traits they don't normally possess.

In story terms, your character takes a short period of time to concentrate on a particular situation. The more elaborate the situation, the longer it takes to meditate upon it. The form of concentration depends on the mage's focus, and can range from a BDSM session to a hard night at the library. A scholar could hit the books and lose himself in study for an upcoming exam; a Pagan seer might walk through the woods, reaching out to the spirits of that place. Spider Chase might spin fire while Zafira Angelita prays for the guidance of God.

In game terms, roll Perception + Dream (difficulty 6) to gain insights into the question at hand. As long as your character hasn't been interrupted during his meditative practice, she can draw upon a certain amount of free-floating knowledge that deals with the situation. If the Perception + Dream roll succeeded, you get to substitute your Dream rating for another Ability that's related to the subject of her concentration. If the character doesn't normally have that Ability, she can still use it to address that situation for a single uninterrupted task, assuming that she meditated upon a related subject that day; if she *does* have that Ability, she can use the Dream rating instead of that Ability – one Trait does not add on to the other.

As an example, let's say that Spider's facing a major fight against an opponent who really knows what he's doing. Her slight Brawl Skill isn't gonna cut it, so she meditates while spinning fire. In her mind, Spider flies through complex katas at eye-blurring speed. Spider's player rolls four successes on the Perception + Dream roll, and so, during that fight – and only for the duration of that fight – Spider finds herself with four dots' worth of Martial Arts, an Ability she doesn't normally possess. After the fight ends, Spider's skill fades away; for the life of her, she can't recall what she just did.

This Background isn't reliable. You might get some Ability you didn't expect, and you can't hang on to what you know – it's more of a *feeling* than a *certainty*. The Dream-granted Ability lasts for the duration of one necessary task – a fight, an exam, a board meeting, a race, and so forth – and can be used only to fulfill that task. Dream can be used only once per day, and although the player can state what she'd *like* to learn, the Storyteller makes the final decision about the Ability conferred by that Dream.

X You lack that special connection to the collective consciousness.
• You catch hazy bits of related information. One die for the task.
•• Helpful insights present themselves during a trance. Two dice for the task.
••• Your meditations produce serious results. Three dice for the task.
•••• From a trance, you can pull amazing bits of knowledge. Four dice for the task.
••••• You've got a direct line to the collective consciousness. Given time to focus, you can pick up phenomenal things. Five dice for the task.

Enhancement $

Enlightened hypertech can accomplish incredible things, few of them more staggering (or, to some mages, unholy) than the modification of living tissue with the power of machines. Such enhancements improve upon (or desecrate) Nature's work, creating more-or-less permanent mutations – cybernetic limbs or genegineered biomods that give the subject powers far beyond normal abilities.

An Enhanced character has one of three options:

- A *cyborg* has biomechanical devices integrated into her body: Primium bones, extendable claws, infra-red scanners, and so on. The Background rating gives that character a certain amount of cybernetic Enhancement Devices, at the cost of permanent Paradox points.

- A *biomodifed* (or *biomodded*) person has permanent organic modifications grafted, grown, or otherwise implanted into his body. The Background rating acts like cybernetics, with permanent Paradox but a few benefits over mechanical modification.

- A *genegineered* being has certain physical enhancements that make him stronger, faster, tougher, smarter, more perceptive, or better-looking than a typical specimen of that species. The Background rating boosts the related Attributes above their normal maximums, at the cost of permanent genetic flaws.

Those three options *cannot* be combined. A single character may have only one, not all three. Each option has certain rules and limitations:

- **Cybernetics:** These devices turn you into a Paradox magnet. In game terms, you've got permanent Paradox points added to your Paradox Wheel; these points never go away, and any additional Paradox you earn gets added to those permanent points. Thus, Paradox backlashes can get very ugly.

  Cyber-implants are essentially machines keyed to your body. Cyborgs who annoy their inventors have their implants removed, which tends to be a terminal process. Such entities are also walking investments for their creators, who keep *very* close watch on the behavior and location of those human resources. The lessons of Frankenstein are not lost on people who build cyborgs, and they often install failsafes in order to cut down on such unfortunate events. If nothing else, they'll often go to ridiculous lengths to retrieve an errant cyborg... or to destroy her.

  As for the effects of Life-based magick on cybernetic humanoids... well, it's not pretty. Such witcheries cause organic tissue to reject the mechanical devices. Life spells inflict two additional levels of aggravated damage on cyborgs if they get past the cyborg's countermagick. As a protection, Technocracy cyborgs get outfitted with ***Primium Countermeasures***, which are described under ***Biotech*** in **Appendix II**, **(p. 659)**. Cyborgs from non-Technocratic sects, however, are kinda screwed.

- **Biomods:** This form of genetic or flesh-crafting mutation essentially installs permanent modifications to the character's body. Unlike mechanical cybernetics, these mods cannot be uninstalled or rejected from the body. (They can, of course, be cut off or surgically removed.) The extra Life Sphere damage, then, does not apply to biomods, although the permanent Paradox points still apply to obvious biomods. Like genegineering enhancements, biomods also make the character take one Genetic Flaw per level in the Background Trait.

- **Genegineering:** Unlike mechanical enhancements, genegineering isn't usually obvious. Unless a gene-modded bioconstruct lifts a car or bounces bullets off his chest, he can typically pass for a normal human being. Even so, the imperfect understanding of organic tissue – or simply the hubris of people who would master it – leaves its own legacy: madness, illness, and so forth, represented in the rules by the ***Genetic Flaw*** Traits, described in **Appendix II**, **(pp. 648 and 651)**.

The following Attributes – *and no others!* – may be boosted by Enhancements: *Strength*, *Dexterity*, *Stamina*, *Appearance*, *Perception*, *Intelligence* and *Health*. These added Trait dots can raise a character's normal Traits as high as 8 and may be divided between several different Attributes... for example, three to Strength and two to Stamina.

Thanks to its powerful effects and unusual properties, the Enhancements Trait is more expensive than usual. This Background costs *TWO points per dot*, instead of the usual one point. These modifications are essentially built-in Devices, so this Background cannot be shared, requisitioned or pooled. It *can* be raised with experience points, provided there's another character around who knows how to work with the associated technologies. We *do not recommend* allowing player characters to purchase this Background higher than the maximum rating of 5. Certain powerful supporting-cast characters might have more extensive modifications, but such extreme Enhancements should be off-limits to your players.

Typically, the Enhancements Background applies only to Technocrat characters. With the Storyteller's approval, however, other tech-based characters (Etherites, Virtual Adepts, cyberpagans, etc.) may get such mods as well. There's one caveat, however: The Union has spent *decades* perfecting these technologies, while individual mad scientists have flown by the seat of their pants. It is utterly appropriate to make non-Technocrat characters take additional Flaws or suffer other game-based penalties based on their Enhancements.

For details about Enhancements and their related Flaws, again see the ***Biotech*** and ***Genetic Flaws*** sections in **Appendix II**, **(pp. 648-651)** and **(pp. 657-661)**.

X	No special modifications.
•	+1 Attribute dot, or 3 points for Devices. One Paradox point or Genetic Flaw.
••	+2 Attribute dots, or 6 points for Devices. Two Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.
•••	+3 Attribute dots, or 9 points for Devices. Three Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.
••••	+4 Attribute dots, or 12 points for Devices. Four Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.
•••••	+5 Attribute dots, or 15 points for Devices. Five Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.

Fame

For some story-based reason, you're famous within the Sleeper world. Maybe you're a hip-hop star, a politician, an athlete, or one of the boom/ bust stardom circle generated by YouTube and reality TV. Among folks in the know, you're considered a celebrity; the higher your rating, the greater your fame.

A decidedly mixed blessing, this Trait gives you a fairly high profile. The authorities will be less likely to mess with you (unless they want to make an example of you...), fans will give you a certain amount of deference, and folks will believe things of you that they would not accept from a normal person. Sure, that kung-fu superstar can kick a hole through a brick wall – didn't you see her last movie? And hey, if *that* guy looked at me *that* way, I'd

pass out too! Fame confers status at the cost of visibility and lets you get away with coincidences few other folks could manage.

This Background also complements Social Traits when you're trying to get things done. A successful Charisma, Manipulation, or Appearance + Fame roll can open lots of doors. Of course, folks will *recognize* you, too, so don't expect to scam those free airline tickets or get past that security detail without someone remembering that you did it. In the age of cell phone cameras, YouTube, and CCTV, a famous person has a hard time getting away with stuff. Cast a spell in public, and there'll be videos of the event online in no time.

Fame is fleeting, too, especially in this age of disposable celebrities. In story terms, you'll have to keep doing big things in order to be remembered. And just as there are folks who'll love you for what you do, there'll be folks who hate your guts for it as well. Fame brings stalkers, haters, critics, and thieves... and if you don't want them in your life, then *why'd you choose to become FAMOUS...?*

X — No one of consequence.

• — Within a select subculture, folks know your name. Perhaps you were more famous once, but those days are long behind you now.

•• — A local celebrity, you're known by all the right people in your community.

••• — Someone of note, you're recognized by large portions of the population at large.

•••• — A national, or perhaps even international, figure, you're recognized by large portions of the general populace.

••••• — You're famous almost everywhere.

Familiar/ Companion

Animal allies remain an integral part of the classical mage's mystique. Who hasn't heard of the witch's cat, the telepathic steed, the wolf-brother, or the lab-assistant made of spare parts and ingenuity? Tradition calls such entities *familiars*, and most of the Nine Traditions tend to use that name as well. Other groups, as usual, employ their own names: assistants, brothers, soul-beasts, spirit animals, and so forth.

Although the Technocracy does not officially acknowledge such deviation from protocol in its ranks, certain Technocrats – especially among the Progenitors, the New World Order, and Iteration X – have been known to employ **Companions**: cybernetically enhanced critters, bioengineered experiments, clones, and so on. Lab animals have their intelligence and capabilities boosted with the wonders of hyperscience, and vat-grown humans with perfect skin and dazzling features stock the offices and bordellos of Syndicate bosses. Out on the

murky fringes where protocol becomes a stern suggestion, Void Engineers work alongside friendly(?) aliens and technologically modified Earth creatures. These Companions, of course, are *nothing* like those superstitionist familiars – such comparisons would be tantamount to treason! And yet, it's funny how much Companions and Familiars have in common. In game terms, of course, they're pretty much the same thing. Technocrats define their bonding ceremonies and feeding procedures differently, but the Background Trait works the same way for both definitions.

A Familiar/ Companion's primary role involves companionship. Mages lead strange lives that often remove them from normal human interactions, and just as people crave pets of various species, mages crave the company of entities that understand those strange lives they lead. It might seem weird to staff your lab with hyperintelligent mice (and downright crazy to fill it with hyperintelligent apes!), but when weirdness defines your daily life, those companions seem perfectly appropriate. With very few exceptions, these creatures have at least a human level of intelligence, enigmatic levels of perception and arcane wisdom, and at least one or two physical abilities beyond what you might expect from a normal animal or person.

What type of Familiar or Companion do *you* have? That depends on your approach to life and magick. Common Familiars/ Companions for various mage types include:

- **Charismatic megafauna:** Wolves, bears, alligators, eagles, hawks, apes, big cats, oxen, bison, horses, stags, reindeer, etc. (Shamans, nature witches, martial artists, clergy, wizards, and so forth.)
- **Small but capable animals:** Mice, rats, domestic cats and dogs, rabbits and hares, ravens, owls, foxes, pigeons, parrots, monkeys, snakes, etc. (Urban or rural witches, street folks, suburban mystics, mad scientists, academics, saints, and so on.)
- **Attack Beasts:** Large dogs, domesticated big cats, raptors, serpents, spiders, etc. (Witches, Black Suits, agents of authority, military personnel, war mages, etc.)
- **Machines:** Robots, androids, and other mechanical assistants. (Various types of technomancer.)
- **Servitors:** Clones; weird servants; incredibly strong, attractive, or capable "people" who seem unusually obedient and a bit more, yet less, than human. (Executives, celebrities, criminals, mad scientists, urban witches, seers, cult leaders, decadent tempters, Infernalists, etc.)
- **Dead Things:** Zombies, animated skeletons, disembodied yet "living" body parts – heads, hands, etc. (Necromancers, wizards, cult leaders, gutter kids, and other dark-side mages.)
- **Constructs:** Golems, cyborgs, technologically augmented animals, monsters stitched together from previously dead bodies, etc. (Mad scientists and other technomancers; old-school ritual magicians make them out of clay, stone, and so forth.)
- **Hybrid Beings:** Mermaids, centaurs, satyrs, unicorns, and so on. (They're attracted to high-mythic mystics, wizards, nature witches, mad scientists, Marauders, etc.)
- **Aliens:** Greys, Bug-Eyed Monsters, Horrors From Beyond Space and Time. (Void Engineers, Etherites, mad scientists, crazed cultists, lone geek weirdoes, Black Suits, etc.)
- **Imps:** Little devils, demonic beasties, scary little critters, etc. (Infernalists, wizards, scary witches, cult leaders, etc.)
- **Spirit Servitors**: Elementals, invisible servants, minor ghosts, nature spirits, epiphlings, etc. (Shamans of all types, seers, wizards, witches, etc.)
- **Data Beasts:** Incarnated programs on the Digital Web. (Internet-based technomancers of all kinds.)

Whatever form your associate takes, the Familiar/ Companion has a mind and consciousness of its own, with agendas and desires you might *assume* but never truly *know*. There's always something vaguely alien about them, and not even the greatest Mind-based Arts can completely penetrate the thought process of such entities.

In game terms, this Background – like Allies and Mentor – reflects a character affiliated with the player and yet created and run by the Storyteller. Beyond companionship, that character confers several other benefits onto his mage:

- **Advice:** The Familiar/ Companion has access to certain types of information and can lend insights to his associated mage. Generally, this works as a handful of Knowledges – Cosmology, Enigmas, Occult, and possibly some others – from which the Familiar/ Companion can offer suggestions to his mage. The dice pool for that Trait equals one die for each dot in the Background. Say, for example, that Spider Chase has a Familiar 3 blue tarantula. Spider needs some advice about a riddle, the Storyteller rolls three dice, and the tarantula spins some advice into a web.
- **Empathy:** The mage and her Companion share an emotional bond and each can sense what the other is feeling. In order to conceal those feelings, a character must make a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll, using the other character's Willpower as the difficulty. Even then, the other partner will realize that the character's trying to hide something.
- **The Feast of Nettles/ Paradox Nullification:** When an impending Paradox backlash threatens the Companion's mage, or when that mage absorbs dangerous amounts of Paradox energies, the Familiar can absorb a certain amount of those energies. So long as the Companion stays close to his mage, usually within 10 yards (33 feet) or so, he can bleed off a few points from a mage's Paradox trait or consume a pending backlash.

  The Familiar can hold up to five points of Paradox for each dot in the Background; Spider's spider, then, could

retain up to 15 points of Paradox. The Familiar nullifies those points at a rate of one point per week. If the Familiar reaches maximum capacity – say, 15 Paradox for Spider's spider – then the whole amount of Paradox explodes in a horrific backlash that affects both the mage and the Familiar equally. See ***Physical Backlash, a.k.a. "the Burn"*** under ***The Paradox Effect*** in **Chapter Ten**, (p. 551).

By the way, Familiars don't enjoy this sort of thing *at all*, and they may get fed up (so to speak) with a mage who makes them "eat nettles" very often. A Familiar gets quite cranky when he's stuffed with Paradox, and he may break the bond or otherwise act up if his mage keeps using him like a Paradox battery.

Quintessence Feeding: In return for those benefits, the Familiar requires a certain amount of Quintessence or Tass per week. Mystic critters devour magickal energies by suckling on the mage, bathing in her aura, or otherwise sharing physical or metaphysical contact. Technological Companions eat Quintessence-rich snacks (that is, Tass), absorb Quintessence through physical contact (affection, mind-melds, sex, and so on), or get powered up by the mage's hypertech machines. In game terms, it's all the same thing: the mage offers Quintessence and the Companion feeds on it. No Quintessence, no Familiar; the disgruntled Companion disappears and the mage loses all of the benefits associated with her Companion.

Familiars also crave gifts, favors, affection, and so on. The nature of those offerings depends on the individual Companion and might be weird, arbitrary, or outright horrifying.

Smart mages are protective of their Familiars... and with good reason. If a Familiar dies, the associated mage automatically loses all benefits of that relationship, plus one point of *permanent* Willpower plus two points of Quintessence for each level in the Background Trait. If that costs more Quintessence than the mage has to offer, then the additional points of Quintessence become points of Paradox instead. Should someone squash Spider's tarantula, for example, she'd lose six points of Quintessence; if she has only two points to begin with, then she also gains four points of Paradox. Moral: don't let anyone squash your Familiar!

A Familiar/ mage bond begins with an appropriate summoning ceremony. Shamans have vision quests, witches call forth a helpmeet, mad scientists make their Companions through unorthodox technologies, and so forth. Regardless of the specifics, the mage and her Companion agree to share a close bond with one another. So long as both parties survive and honor the terms of that agreement – terms that demand certain commitments and sacrifices from the mage – the bond remains intact.

This Background covers a special kind of Companion; other companion critters without the Background's special properties would count as Allies or a Totem instead. For the game-stats of various beings, see **Appendix I**, and for an array of familiars and the rules for creating such characters, see the **Mage 20** sourcebook **Gods, Monsters, and Familiar Strangers**.

X — No special pets.

• — Your Companion has access to a few scattered bits of helpful information. (Requires one Quintessence point per week and can absorb up to five points of Paradox.)

•• — You've got a pretty cool Companion. (Requires two Quintessence points per week and can absorb up to 10 points of Paradox.)

••• — A magnificent Companion shares its wisdom and loyalty with you. (Three Quintessence points per week and up to 15 points of Paradox.)

•••• — You're favored with the presence (if not always the good behavior) of a smart and miraculous creature. (Four Quintessence points per week with up to 20 points of Paradox.)

••••• — Your Familiar probably knows more than you do, can be quite demanding, and has a *very* outspoken personality. (Five Quintessence points per week, may retain up to 25 points of Paradox, and will give you lots of shit about both.)

Influence

You command attention and respect within the Sleepers' world. Perhaps you're a celebrity, gang boss, politician, or cult leader... or maybe you've just got lots of powerful friends. Either way, when you speak, folks listen and frequently obey.

Generally, this Background reflects a certain amount of social deference that you receive even without rolling the Trait. When a high-Influence person walks into a room, people notice; folks behave themselves accordingly, small favors are offered, impossible arrangements suddenly get made in your favor... that sort of thing. By combining Social Attributes with this Background (say, Manipulation + Influence), you can work your mojo with the appropriate parties. Mental Attributes (like Perception + Influence) help you spot or secure information through your social network. And although Physical Traits won't help you accomplish actions through your Influence, a showy athletic feat (say, Stamina + Influence to reflect one of those "*Nobody could survive THAT!*" sorts of stunts) can impress a large number of people if you do something lots of people can see.

To reflect the fame certain people command, this Background can go up to 10. Remember, though, that famous and influential people are easily recognized and tend to be responsible for (and held accountable by) lots of people. Influence is double-edged in that regard, and unwise activities can lower your Influence rating. Sure, you can walk into a restaurant and treat people like dirt – just expect some nasty social media reactions to you as soon as your back is turned...

Certain magickal practices tend to utilize this sort of Influence; see the ***Art of Desire*** and ***Dominion*** entries, and their associated instruments, in the ***Practices*** section of **Chapter Ten,** (pp. 573 and 577).

X — No influence to speak of.

• — Folks within your profession recognize you.

•• You've got various associates and a small degree of clout.

••• People within your field respect your abilities.

•••• You've got quite a bit of clout.

••••• You're a force to be reckoned with.

••••• • You command influence within your nation's political affairs.

••••• •• Your actions influence various allied nations.

••••• ••• You command vast respect across whole cultural regions.

••••• •••• Your dominance extends across whole socio-political spheres. (The EU, UN, ANC, etc.)

••••• ••••• Your influence extends across the mortal world, with some respect granted even in the Otherworlds.

Legend

Humanity's collective imagination focuses on you. Although you might not *actually* be a reincarnation of King Arthur or Biggie Smalls, you evoke those figures on a primal level. People see you as a legend, and so they expect legendary things from you. As a result, you function as a walking Node, able to recharge your own Quintessence – and possibly the Quintessence of other people too – by living up to your associated legend.

In story terms, pick a legend and then model your character off some familiar elements of that figure. Little Red would wear a crimson hoodie and wander off where she's not supposed to go; Popeye would talk weird, eat spinach, and get into lots of fights. Our media age manufactures legends, so your model could be a pop-culture character, though the power of such legends doesn't run very deep. The more you live up to the legend, the more energy it lends to you.

In game terms, you can roll your Legend Background no more than once *per story*. Each success refreshes one point of Quintessence in your pool. (It's wise to choose a high Avatar rating if you've got this Background.) The difficulty of that roll depends on how well-known that legend is in your current location; embodying Sun Tzu might score you major props in a Chinese military academy, but the average U.S. citizen would be like, "Sun *WHO?*" The roll's minimum difficulty is 6; if your Legend is obscure, that can go as high as 9.

Once per story, you can also instill items with Quintessence – turning them into Tass – if they've had something to do with you living up to your legend. A Colt .45 used by a modern Jesse James, for instance, would acquire a certain energy through association. Such items have a potent feel to them; even Sleepers sense something special about Jimi Hendrix's guitar. Characters who can use Quintessence may access that Tass for their own purposes. Each dot in this Background allows you to either instill a single object with the entire Background rating's worth of Quintessence, or you can imbue one item with a single point of Tass for every dot in the Background. Legend 5, then, would either fill a single item with five points of Quintessence or imbue one point of Quintessence into five separate items. Once that Tass is used, it's gone until the next story.

Other Awakened characters can recharge their Avatars from you as well, if and when they take an active role in your legend. A lover of James Dean, a drinking companion of Janis Joplin, a mage sharing the Round Table of a reincarnated Lancelot – these characters may enjoy the benefits of this walking Node effect as well, so long as they've participated in the legend over the course of that particular story.

(Technocrats can have this Background too; that reincarnated Lancelot might be a cyborg with a particularly noble personality and a really active dream life.)

Objects or animals can have the Legend Background, with all the same powers of a character's Legend. In this case, the "living up to the legend" element requires other people to believe in their connection to that legend. Hendrix's Sunburst Stratocaster might be a Legend in its own right, an object of reverence for music lovers everywhere. A mage who got her hands on that guitar could recharge her Avatar by playing the instrument... which explains why certain objects become hot properties among folks who know them for what they are, and why people keep killing white buffalo and stags whenever they appear. Legendary objects and animals, though, should remain property of the Storyteller. If the Storyteller allows a character to acquire that object or animal, it becomes a Treasure or Ally.

In all cases, that Quintessence holds legendary Resonance too. Smoke from a joint passed by Monsieur Zig Zag will evoke the 1960s even in 2015, and faint echoes of *Ahiii-ahiii-ahhhh!!!* follow the trail of a Man With No Name. Lizzie Borden's hatchet makes people feel queasy even though the real Lizzie Borden killed no one with it. That force of belief clings to the essence of a Legend Trait. Folks touched by a legend *know* they've been part of something extraordinary.

This Background works well with these Backgrounds: *Destiny*, *Past Lives*, and *Totem*, and with certain Merits and Flaws as well. Obviously, you need a compelling reason to claim the Legend Background. Simply *looking* like Jim Morrison is not enough – you must *be* Jim Morrison in every way that matters. Plenty of people *claim* to be "the new Beatles" or "the next Jesus Christ," but the connection has to run deeper than that. This Background draws upon sublime power from the realm of archetypes. Unless that power runs true and manifests in clear and constant form, then you're just another pretender, not the real McCoy.

X No legendary connection.

• An obscure legend (Clever Gretel, Abou Hassan) or minor pop culture figure (Betty Boop, Grumpy Cat).

•• A minor legend (Sinbad the Sailor, Don Quixote) or significant pop culture figure (Janis Joplin, the Cheshire Cat).

••• A famous legend (Guy Fawkes, Shaka Zulu) or pop culture icon (Batman, Elvis).

•••• A major legend (George Washington, Geronimo, Red Riding Hood).

••••• A universally popular legend (Cinderella, King Arthur, the Mona Lisa).

Library

Wow... do people even *need* books in the Internet Age? Well, yes, actually. Although the Internet has a near-infinite supply of information, there's still plenty of information that's available only in books. Especially when you're dealing with esoteric, mystic, historical, or academic information, a good library can offer data that no net search can uncover. As much as new-millennium mages learn to appreciate the Internet (or else suffer for the lack of that appreciation), hard-copy archives are still essential to the serious student of the magickal Arts and Enlightened hypersciences.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, this Background Trait reflects access to a multimedia archive that's vital to that particular mage. An old-fashioned magus might shake his gray head at all that Internet foolishness, but even he will probably still have photographs, record albums, film reels, and probably even **gasp!** DVDs, CDs or MP3s in his archive, if only because so much of the last century has been recorded in such media. An urban witch might have a small but significant collection of classical magick tomes or old '60s-era psychedelic magazines to compliment his broadband connection, and even the most sublime transhumanist retains a few dog-eared copies of Mondo 2000 or Piss Clear in her collection. The exact nature of your Library, then, will depend upon your personality and yet give you unrestricted access to an impressive amount of information when you need it.

Because your Library Background is based around a store of useful information for your mage, it includes material that helps you research your chosen Abilities and Spheres. You'll need to add to your collection from time to time when learning about new topics (no wonder mages tend to be inveterate data-hounds), but then you'll be able to research topics dealing with those Traits by making successful Mental Trait + Library rolls. Such research, of course, demands time and effort... and with bigger archives, both that time and effort can be substantial!

To reflect enormous archives, this Background can go above 5. A tight-knit and trusting group can also pool this Background, creating truly impressive archives. In this case, the group's Library Background equals the Library Background of the highest-rated member of that group, plus one dot for each additional contributor. (A cabal whose members have, respectively, Library ratings of 3, 2, 2, and 1 would have a total combined Library Background of 6.) After all, a combined archive will have redundant material... and how many copies of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* do you really need?

For information about ***Raising and Learning Traits***, see the section of that name later in this chapter, **(pp. 336-337)**.

X — Those copies of Cosmo won't help you learn Spheres.

• — You've got a few New Age paperbacks.

•• — Lots of fiction, little substance.

••• — There's some useful stuff in there when you go digging for it.

•••• — Your collection of arcane data is respectable.

••••• — You've got a pretty decent collection of diverse lore.

••••• • — You enjoy a huge personal archive.

••••• •• — Your database features extensive written, recorded, and virtual information.

••••• ••• — You're got full access to a national archive.

••••• •••• — You enjoy unrestricted access to personal, national, and classified databases.

••••• ••••• — Given enough time (and assistance), you can access almost anything that's been written down and stored. You might not *understand* it (damn those codes, lost languages, and foreign tongues!), but you could probably *find* it.

Mentor

An "elder" mage has taken an interest in you and provides training, guidance, and occasional assistance. Note that said elder might be your own age or even younger, said training could consist of dropping you off rooftops, said guidance may involve more Yodaisms than a *Karate Kid* marathon, and said assistance could boil down to whacking you in the head just *after* you read that passage in the flesh-bound grimoire. This Background's rating reflects how helpful your mentor is for you, above and beyond her personal power. After all, a Hermetic Grand Master isn't much good for her students if she refuses to do anything other than let them sleep on her floor.

The mentor/ student bond tends to be one of the most influential experiences of a mage's life. In many cases, the mentor notices some interesting talent in a currently unAwakened Sleepwalker, initiates the prospective student, and then nurtures and guides that spark as it bursts into full Awakening. This is especially the case with Technocrats, who often get recruited soon before or just after they attain Enlightenment... or else get converted from their previous Reality Deviant careers by an effective Technocratic operative.

Mentors have their own agendas, of course, and those goals aren't always obvious. Plenty of mages get their first taste of Awakened society from mentors who are distant, abusive, manipulative, uncaring, ineffective, or downright insane. Others, of course, learn from elders who turn out to be loving, caring, insightful, and wise. It really depends on the nature of your mage's personality, backstory, and affiliation. Technocratic mentors are often (though not always) cold and efficient, whereas mystics can be silly, eccentric, aloof, or any combination of wizardly traits you can imagine.

Game-wise, a Mentor provides some social lubricant, magickal or technological training, occasional resources, and perhaps interventions or assistance if your mage really needs help. In return, she'll expect a certain amount of respect, obedience, and help around the workshop. A student's behavior, good or bad, reflects upon his mentor, so it's not wise to abuse this relationship. Especially for a young and inexperienced mage, an angry mentor can be a terrible thing.

As with Allies and Familiar, this Background represents Storyteller characters with their own backgrounds, personalities,

motivations, and relationships to the world at large. Your Storyteller can (and should) have a blast playing up such characters, running agendas that often remain obscure to the students in their path. Remember the various games being run by elders throughout the Harry Potter saga – games in which the pupils rarely understood what was really going on. Mentors give nothing for nothing; if one has taken a guiding interest in your mage, there's *always* something more than simple kindness or duty involved!

For examples regarding the mentor-student relationships in various groups, see the ***Initiation*** sections of the two-page spreads throughout **Chapter Five**.

X	No mentor worth mentioning.
•	An unreliable or inexperienced mentor.
••	A helpful yet eccentric guide.
•••	A good and noteworthy teacher.
••••	A wise, helpful, and respected elder.
•••••	A powerful elder with serious investments in your success.

Node

In a world where magick seems scarce, you've got access to a miracle: a Node where you can meditate to restore your inner Quintessence or gather solid-energy Tass in various forms. You may have to fight to keep this place to yourself, though – werewolves, spirits, and rival mages are always looking to add such places to their collections. The Node might not be obvious as a magical site; most of them are not. To folks who understand such things, though, Nodes stand out as beacons of energy desired by mystics and Technocrats alike.

In the grand tradition of religions and empires everywhere, Nodes tend to get converted to suit the purposes of the groups that claim them. The Technocracy sends in teams to sanitize mystic Nodes and then builds strongholds, labs, or power stations on top of the previous installation. Mystic mages consecrate such territories in their own ways, building temples over glens, churches over wells, and shopping malls or computer labs over the holy ground once honored by a rival group. In short, Nodes present one of the nastier fronts of the Ascension War. Even allied mages, like Celestial Choristers and Verbena, are not above repurposing one another's sacred spaces... all for the greater good, of course!

As **Chapter Three** mentions, Nodes have Resonance that comes from the type of energy that formed them. The Tass from a given site carries that Resonance with it too, and the form that Tass takes will follow the nature of the Node. A Node forged by a battle might radiate fury and sadness, incarnated as blood, bones, and ash; a fountain of hope feels refreshing and clean, with pure water Tass; but a Frankenstein-esque laboratory feels Gothic and foreboding, with lightning bolt Quintessence arcing between generators and captured in batteries, as Tass, for later use. The Gauntlet tends to thin out around mystic Nodes, but it thickens in Technocratic ones unless you're using Dimensional Science procedures instead of spirit magick.

As a Background Trait, this Node represents a location that's held by your character and perhaps a few friends. You can pool Background points to buy a larger Node, though your group will need a reasonable, story-based reason if you want to begin the chronicle with a place of great power. Your Node produces a certain amount of ambient, untapped Quintessence that your Avatar can absorb while you meditate in that spot for a while, plus a bit of Tass that can be collected in solid form and used later elsewhere. The exact amounts of Tass and free Quintessence depend upon the nature of your chronicle: a high-fantasy saga's Node might produce as much as five or 10 Quintessence points per week for every dot in the Background rating, whereas a "magic is dying" chronicle would have Nodes that produce only one or two Quintessence per week for each dot in that Trait. Ultimately, the Storyteller determines the per-week value of a Node. For industrial-era chronicles, we suggest two points per week, per dot in the Trait – half of that in free Quintessence, the other half in Tass. Regardless of its form, that supply of Quintessence is finite. If you absorb it all into your Avatar or collect it all as Tass, that Node needs to replenish its energy before it can be used again.

Werewolves think of Nodes as *caerns*: sacred spaces blessed by their primal moon-goddess. Driven by religious fervor, they tend to claim Nodes for themselves when they can. Although such creatures avoid the cold factories of Technocratic power, a mage or cabal with a mystic Node could have some large, furry visitors wishing to discuss a real-estate transaction...

(Note: The caern levels have been adjusted from older versions of the rules in order to reflect the 1-10 scale of this Background.)

X	No place of power.
•	A tiny site of minor significance. (Level One caern.)
••	A small trickle of metaphysical energy. (Level One caern.)
•••	A steady flow of Quintessence. (Level Two caern.)
••••	A pulse of energy, plus generous quantities of materialized Tass. (Level Two caern.)
•••••	A powerful wellspring of energetic abundance. (Level Three caern.)
••••• •	A focused Node, with both Tass and ambient energy refined by Prime Arts or sciences. (Level Three caern.)
••••• ••	A considerable force of metaphysical power. (Level Four caern.)
••••• •••	A rare and wondrous place, brimming with incarnate Prime Force. (Level Four caern.)
••••• ••••	One of the grandest sacred spots, or most potent refineries, in the material world. (Level Five caern.)
••••• •••••	One of the rarest and most precious sites on Earth... and a certain battleground for the forces that would tap its power. (Level Five caern.)

Past Lives

Reincarnation remains a subject of debate, even among mages. Akashics and Chakravanti base their entire approach to reality upon that idea, yet their Chorus allies (to say nothing of those atheistic Technocrats) deny the concept of recycled souls... or sometimes the very *idea* of a soul! Still, there appears to be *something* there... a familiar essence that certain people can call upon in times of need.

With this Background, you can meditate on a past life (or, at the Storyteller's discretion, experience a sudden burst of insight) in order to get help in a current situation. Maybe the glare of an imposing adversary reminds you of that time you faced down Stalin's chief operative, or that weird book reminds you of the alchemical scroll you studied in Byzantium. If the Past Lives Background kicks in, your memories help you with the present dilemma.

Game-wise, this Background's dice pool may add to the dice pool of another task. Once per game session, you can check in with that well of memory. Every dot in Past Lives gives you one die to roll against difficulty 8; each success on that roll gives you an extra die to use on an upcoming roll with some other Ability. These dice can either add to the dice pool for an Ability you already possess, or else – like the Background: *Dream* – give you a temporary dice pool for an Ability you don't normally have on your sheet. Past Lives does not ensure success, but it can lend a bit of extra expertise.

Botching a Past Lives roll lands you in the middle of some past-life trauma; for a crucial moment, the memories overwhelm your character, blowing any chance of success in the here-and-now. That's especially disconcerting if your mage doesn't *believe* in reincarnation! ("*What the hell was THAT all about...?*") For an extra dose of Awesome Sauce, note down details of your past life when you access this Trait successfully. Such memories will probably come in handy again someday...

X	No past lives to speak of.
•	Faint traces of some previous incarnation.
••	Frequent cases of déjà vu.
•••	Definite memories of other lives.
••••	Clear recall of previous experiences and other lives.
•••••	Which life *is* this one again?

Patron

In the chessboard politics of the Ascension factions, certain players conceal their faces from the pawns. One of those players has dedicated him- or herself to your welfare... at least for the moment. Chances are, you have no idea who this patron is, what they want, or what the final bill for services rendered will be; even if you *think* you know who's behind that goodwill, the truth remains uncertain. This person is no Mentor or Ally but a secretive benefactor whose true goals remain hidden... at least for the moment... from your understanding.

Game-wise, Patron reflects a powerful party who's watching out for your character's interests. Only the Storyteller knows what

this party's plans are and what their interest in the character might be. At the beginning of the chronicle, at least, this benefactor exerts force in mysterious ways: orders get reversed, contracts issued or terminated, gifts delivered, hints dropped, and strings pulled. Magick will not reveal the reason of these indulgences – the patron's far too clever to get caught that easily. There's clearly some alliance or common ground involved, but the nature of that connection remains elusive. Especially in paranoid labyrinths like the Hermetic or Technocratic Orders, this mysterious generosity can be *very* disconcerting. Someday, you know, the patron will call in his markers...

X No special friends.

• A shadowy someone pulling occasional strings.

•• A helpful benefactor who chooses to remain concealed.

••• A superior or elder who helps you for mysterious reasons.

•••• A powerful party who appears to favor you.

••••• A high-ranking mage or Technocrat who seems dedicated to your well-being... at least for now.

Rank

You hold a title of some distinction among the masses – perhaps a military rank, a religious office, an executive position with a powerful corporation, or some similarly influential post. That position grants you a degree of respect, certain perks related to the job, and probably the immediate deference (and obedience) of lower-ranking personnel. Naturally, this rank demands responsibility to that office too; a head of state can't just run off and have adventures when she pleases! Ranks above the ones shown below certainly exist, but they're not suitable for player characters because they demand too much time and responsibility.

Especially common among Technocrats, this Background commands ***Influence*** – as per that Background Trait – equal to the Rank rating. However, this Influence activates *only* among the people under the Rank's dominion (say, staffers under an executive, or citizens under nobility) and in situations in which the character is acting *within the limits of her office*.

Other people might not be so easily impressed, in which case the Influence counts as half the Rank or a level of the Storyteller's choosing. (A mullah still holds some clout with non-Muslims, but not as much as he holds among the faithful.) Also keep in mind that the VP of Finance of a Fortune 500 company might command Influence among people who live and breathe capitalism, but a group of Occupy Wall Street protestors might react *very* negatively to the character's Rank...

When acting in an official capacity, your character may also access ***Resources*** (again, as the Background) equal to half her Rank, or a level of the Storyteller's choosing as a perk of her office... though she'll probably need to answer to her superiors for *how* those Resources are spent! She might also have ***Fame*** at half her Rank among the people she commands. If she wants Influence, Resources, or Fame independent of that Rank, however, then she'll need to buy them separately; a drill sergeant can be wealthy from family money, but that cash flow doesn't come through military channels. Rank might confer other benefits as well, depending on the office. A priest could not commandeer a company's best limousine, but the VP of that company damn well can!

Note that Rank reflects status among Sleeper institutions. Mage status has nothing to do with this Background, although a VP, priest, or drill sergeant might still impress certain Awakened folks due to that person's position in the mortal world.

X No rank with noticing.

• Minor rank: Army sergeant, squire, deacon, school board member, novice journalist, junior manager, university instructor.

•• Low rank: Junior officer, knight, prior, city councilor, staff reporter, senior manager, professor.

••• Medium rank: Captain, baron, abbot, mayor, local columnist, corporate middle-management, tenured faculty.

•••• High rank: Major, count, bishop, governor, syndicated columnist, junior VP, department head.

••••• Command staff: General, prince, archbishop, senator, international correspondent, corporate VP, dean.

Requisitions*

There are reasons for Technocratic dominance. One of them involves the epic resources available to Technocratic operatives. With this Background – *a Trait available ONLY to Technocrats in good standing with the Order* – you can request goodies from your superiors and often expect to get them.

Before a mission, you and your team will be issued whatever gear your superiors expect you to need. If you want more than that (as most agents do), you need to requisition it. In story terms, you tap your contacts and file an official request for the desired goodies – see ***Requisitioning, Outsourcing, and Borrowing Backgrounds***, (pp. 302-303). In game terms, you roll your Requisitions rating as a dice pool. Each success on that roll gives you five Background points with which to buy Devices for that mission. (See ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II** for Devices and their costs.) More than three successes scores you as much mundane Sleepertech as you can use. If your relationship with the Powers That Be is good, this'll be an easy roll... and if not, then good luck getting anything other than an earful of abuse. See ***The Six Degrees*** in **Chapter Five**, (pp. 181-182), for examples of good standing and its alternatives.

Assuming that your reputation remains spotless (or you've at least balanced out your cock-ups with blazing victories), you could simply consider this Background to be worth five Background points per dot when requisitioning Devices. Your Storyteller may reserve the roll for times when you're on thin ice, asking for special favors, or trying to pound a mosquito with a pile driver.

At mission's end, you must return the borrowed gear. If Q Division has to come for it themselves, you'll be losing your

Requisitions rating for a while... and if you're lucky, that's *all* they'll take! Lost or damaged gear reflects poorly on your performance, too – especially if you let some Reality Deviant get her blood-caked hands on Union hypertech. If things went well, your Requisitions rating might go up a dot or two; if not, it might lose one or two dots... even more if you make a catastrophic mess. Your amalgam can pool this Background in order to requisition even more gear, but then the entire group is responsible for both equipment and success. The Technocracy understands that eggs get broken when omelets get prepared, but such understanding goes only so far...

Requisitions Chart

Relationship	Difficulty
Doubtful Loyalty	9
Questionable Loyalty	8
Assumed Loyalty	7
Assured Loyalty	6
Total Loyalty	5

X — No dice: "Get out of my office."

• — One die: They don't take you seriously.

•• — Two dice: "There might be something left over here for you..."

••• — Three dice: You've earned their trust.

•••• — Four dice: Q Division likes you.

••••• — Five dice: You're a trusted and valuable operative.

••••• • — Six dice: A squad of proven agents.

••••• •• — Seven dice: A trusted team of loyal ops.

••••• ••• — Eight dice: A team of specialists.

••••• •••• — Nine dice: An elite strike force with the utmost confidence from above.

••••• ••••• — Ten dice: Maximum clearance, trust, and favor from above.

Resources

As any Syndicate rep could tell you, there's good money to be made with magick – *very* good money if you play your cards right. Naturally, the Syndicate won't refer to what they do as magick – it's simply the Art of Desire, honed to a science. Whatever you choose to call it, this Background means that you've got cash and goods on hand... at the upper levels, *lots* of cash and goods.

Given the staggering wealth that certain mages can accrue, this Background goes to 10. Such wealth isn't just the dominion of the Syndicate, either. Hermetic wizards are infamous for their luxuries, Choristers can command vast resources, and Ecstatic rock stars can make more money than anyone has a right to enjoy. The real fiscal wizards, though, are the so-called money men (and women) whose Convention began with the medieval High Guild and has been going strong ever since. Some mages come from that kind of old money; others make their own fortunes. Given the economic potential of Spheres like Entropy, Matter, Mind, and Life, after all, why *not* go for the gold?

If course, it's often dangerous to rely too much upon magickal income. Transactions these days are mostly conducted in virtual money: debit cards, credit cards, bank withdrawals, online deposits, and so on. Throwing around a lot of cash will get you noticed too... why else do you think so many paper-money bills have those tracking strips? A wise mage charms people into fattening her bank account; changing lead into gold is too suspicious (and labor-intensive) to be effective. As with so many other things in this tech-heavy world, it's far easier for a Technocrat to get around such obstacles than it is for a mystic mage to do so. That said, there's quite a bit of old money floating around Hermetic circles and certain witches' covens. Hell, some daring mages even make their fortunes writing New Age books, fantasy novels, or roleplaying games!

High Resource ratings, like other high Backgrounds, take time and effort to control. It's easier to lose fortunes, if you're not careful, than it is to make them. Given the virtual nature of modern commerce, you probably don't have stacks of paper money and precious metals lying around... although, if you're old-school enough, you just might...

Note: As mentioned earlier, the Storyteller may wish to forbid player characters from assembling Resources worth 8, 9, or 10 dots. As described under the ***Art of Desire/ Hypereconomics*** practice, the ***Primal Utility Sphere***, and the ***Money and Wealth*** instrument entries, money can provide a potent source of power for the 21st century mage. See those entries in **Chapter Ten (pp. 573, 526-527, and 596)** for details.

X — Working poor: You live paycheck-to-paycheck, and that's about it.

• — Slightly ahead of the game: You've got a small apartment and perhaps a cheap vehicle. By local standards, a working-class income.

•• — Lower middle class: You've got a condo or apartment, plus a vehicle, some savings, and enough money for occasional indulgences.

••• — Middle class with property: You either own or have decent equity in some property, plus a vehicle, investments, and savings. You could maintain a one-dot standard of living indefinitely.

•••• — Well-off: You own a large house, some property, and at least two vehicles, as well as notable levels of savings and investments. By local standards, you're a millionaire, and although that's not worth as much as it once was, it's still nothing to sneeze at.

••••• — Welcome to the 1%: As a multimillionaire, you've got substantial holdings, investments, and savings.

••••• • Hollywood money: Whatever you want, you've got it.

••••• •• Billionaires' club. You can influence an entire business or industry.

••••• ••• Bruce Wayne level wealth. You own companies.

••••• •••• Tony Stark level wealth. You own industries.

••••• ••••• Bill Gates level wealth. You own governments.

Retainers

"*What will it be tonight, sir?*" When the battle's over (or shortly before it begins), a faithful retainer can bind your wounds, sharpen your weapons, clean up the bodies, and make sure you make it to your 8 o'clock meeting in the morning.

Unlike Allies or Familiars, such Retainers aren't skilled in the mystic Arts or combat; unlike Backup or Spies, they're not faceless guns or founts of information. Each retainer is a devoted servant, employee, mind-controlled servitor, lab-built construct, or even a very minor spirit who does your bidding with a decent sense of loyalty. He'll tend your house, your gear, and your overall busywork. Perhaps he's a pathetic lab-assistant, a mundane apprentice, a lover, or a devoted friend. He's your Igor; she's your Moneypenny. So long as you treat such characters with respect (and maybe even if you don't), this Background gives you extra sets of hands.

As with the aforementioned Backgrounds, each Retainer is a Storyteller character in his or her own right. That character's loyalty depends a lot on circumstances, but she can generally be counted on unless things get really bad. With few exceptions, a Retainer's skills are strictly mundane. He might know some yoga or have office experience, but he won't be hefting a machine gun anytime soon! If and when you train up a Retainer character, that character becomes an Ally instead.

Lab-built constructs and spirit retainers are essentially normal human beings with a certain special effect and origin but no unusual powers beyond, perhaps, unusual strength or the ability to float around the mansion. Other than that, they're just plain folks. Rich people have several retainers on staff, but you don't need to be wealthy to have this Background. A homeless mage might still enjoy the loyalty of the kid she saved from an abusive dad.

X You're doing your *own* laundry, dude!

• One retainer.

•• Two retainers.

••• Three retainers.

•••• Four retainers.

••••• Five retainers.

Sanctum/ Laboratory $

You have a place where you can get away from it all – said "all" being the consensual reality that hinders your Arts and Enlightened Sciences. Oh, this place still exists on the Earthly plane, and it's subject to the Paradox Effect. Still, your Lab or Sanctum is a place of power and privacy, set to fulfill your needs and allow you to hone your skills in relative safety.

A Sanctum can range from a small herb-garden with wards set against intruders and trees planted to screen the place off from casual viewing to small laboratories filled with gleaming scientific gear. Martial-arts studios, yoga lofts, sacred groves, basement dens, band practice spaces, penthouse suites, photography studios, tiny shrines on remote mountaintops – the Sanctum or Lab is whatever you want it to be. Essentially, a mage or group secures the place, dedicates it to reflect their needs and wishes, and sets the reality of that space to suit the owners' purposes. A Progenitor lab might gleam under sterile lights, polished surfaces of steel and glass ready to advance the call of Science. A ritual clearing might nestle in amongst thick forests, old runes cut into trees and stones artfully arranged to emphasize the mystic nature of the place. You might have a blood-spattered basement with chairs of human bones; a '70s-style seduction pad; a bookstore that's open only at night; a hobbit-hole straight out of a Peter Jackson Tolkien flick – whatever suits your fancy (and your available resources) is within the grasp of this Background Trait.

In game terms, this Trait provides several benefits:

- A relatively private space to conduct experiments, meditate, practice your arts, and so on. Again, this privacy *is* relative; Technocratic operatives rarely have such places to themselves. Unless a group or individual is *extremely* wealthy and connected, a Technocratic Laboratory is actually owned and managed by the Union, not by the operatives themselves. Thus, your superiors have their eyes on you even within your sanctuary, and its privacy is more of a courtesy than an absolute.
- A stock of materials you can use – herbs, cauldrons, diagrams, elaborate glyphs carved into the floors, martial arts practice weapons, chemistry arrays, telescopes, microscopes, whatever. This stock depends upon the Background rating and allows you constant access to whatever it is (within reason) that you need.
- A Sanctum's specially prepared ritual space (or a Lab's experimental space) reduces the difficulty of rituals or experiments performed in that area. That reduction depends on the Background trait's rating, as shown below.
- A cloaking effect safeguards the place's location. Essentially, the Sanctum/ Laboratory has an Arcane/ Cloaking rating based on the place's Background rating. You could consider this effect a result of protection wards, concealment fields, an aura of ordinariness… that sort of thing. As long as they stay within the protected area, characters enjoy the protection of this Arcane effect too. (A character who *already* has the Arcane/ Cloaking Background gets whichever Arcane rating is highest – the rating of the Sanctum or the rating of her Arcane rating – not a combination of both.)
- All Effects cast within the Sanctum are considered coincidental magick, so long as those Effects follow the definition of reality within that sanctuary. Cloning would be coincidental within an Iteration X or Progenitor lab; spirit-summoning would be coincidental on a shaman's sacred ground; a witch could conjure imps or heal gaping wounds within his Sanctum; but the Black Suit busting down the door would find himself at a distinct disadvantage there because…
- The Effects of rival mages are considered vulgar in your space. That Man in Black's procedures go against the prevailing reality within that witch's sanctuary, whereas the witch's spells run counter to the established reality of a NWO Construct. Rivals who use the same style of magick would be considered equally at home in a Sanctum – two Verbenae, for example, who hate each other's guts but who employ the same paradigms and tools would both be considered coincidental within the same sanctum; an Etherite, however, would find that her weird science is vulgar within that witch's sacred ground, even if she was allied with one of the rival Verbenae.
- Mystic Sanctums have an additional benefit over technological Laboratories: the Gauntlet rating is one level lower in a place that's been dedicated to magick than it is in a similar place than has not been so dedicated. The Gauntlet in a technomagickal Laboratory, on the other hand – like those used by the Society of Ether or Virtual Adepts – is one level higher than it would be otherwise. And a Technocracy Laboratory has a Gauntlet rating of except with regards to Dimensional Science procedures, whose Effects are considered coincidental in an appropriate Technocratic Lab.

Because of these many benefits, a Sanctum costs *TWO* Background dots for each dot in the Sanctum. Like the ***Enhancements*** Background, it offers an unusual amount of value per dot. If you're allowed to purchase Backgrounds with experience points, Sanctum costs double the usual Background price.

Regardless of its nature, this space must be specially prepared by the group or mage who uses it, with constant maintenance (no less than once per month) to keep the space attuned to the people who use it. A Sanctum can be no larger than 500 square feet, and most of them are much smaller than that… typically a room or two. Because this is personal space, it's often wise to limit the people coming and going throughout your Sanctum. Too much traffic can render a Sanctuary mundane, as far as reality's Consensus is concerned.

X	No special space.
•	A tiny stock of goods; no reduction of ritual difficulties, though your magick is coincidental here. One dot in Arcane.
••	Small stock of goods; ritual difficulties reduced by 1. Two dots in Arcane.
•••	Decent stock of goods; ritual difficulties reduced by 1. Three dots in Arcane.
••••	Fine stock of materials; ritual difficulties reduced by 2. Four dots in Arcane.
•••••	Excellent stock of materials; ritual difficulties reduced by 2. Five dots in Arcane.

Secret Weapons*

As a prized guinea pig for the Technocratic Q Division, you get access to experimental technology. When a new Device reaches the prototype stage, you get a briefing from your friends(...?) at Q, then get sent out to see what the thing will do in the field.

A Background that applies *ONLY* to Technocratic field operatives, this Trait periodically gives you goodies to play with. The Trait rating reflects the sorts of goodies you get access to for a given mission. As with Requisitions, these Devices do *not* belong to you – Q Division wants them back, preferably intact, along with a full report about how the Device functioned in your hands. Hopefully, you'll have good things to say; if things go badly... well, at least Q Division will know what *not* to do next time out.

Favored agents get better gear. Trouble, is, you're not always sure just how favored you really are. When you prepare for a mission, your Storyteller makes a Social Trait + Secret Weapons roll. (The Trait in question depends on the sort of relationship your character has with the Q Division rep: Charisma in most cases, Manipulation if the agent tries to game the system, and Appearance if the agent looks especially attractive to the Q Division rep.) The difficulty depends on how the Q Division rep feels about your agent. A failed roll means that the rep's got nothing for you this time around; one or two successes get you something of dubious value, and three successes or more score you some choice goodies. A botch reflects a flawed gadget – either slipped to you on purpose by a disgruntled rep or something sent into the field before all the bugs have been worked out. Because this is a secret Storyteller roll, you won't know how things turned out until you use the gadgets in the field. Obviously, it pays to be on good terms with your local Q Division representative!

X — Typical agent – no goodies for you!

• — You can get small items of trivial value: pens, lamps, nutrition bars, etc.

•• — They send out small items with limited utility value: sensors, power sources, energy pills, etc.

••• — You start to get the good stuff: small weapons, body armor, medical supplies, etc.

•••• — A trusted agent, you know the quirks of various Q Div weaponsmiths because they come to you when their special toys need to be tested. These items tend to be useful but plagued with finicky and perhaps dangerous bugs.

••••• — You get all kinds of cool, expensive stuff: armor, weapons, advanced transportation gear, and so forth. Now *do* be careful, 007!

Spies

A collection of little birds in various nests keeps you well-informed. These informants aren't necessarily your friends – they may, in fact, hate you with the burning intensity of a thousand fiery suns. For the moment, though, you have something they want: money, sex, drugs, magick, whatever. In return for that indulgence, they'll tell you what they know.

Spies come in many different forms: disgruntled associates, dismayed staff, jaded groupies, desperate addicts, loyal acolytes of your cause, folks who owe you favors, people who'd be in very deep trouble without you, opportunists who like the color of your money, lovers who want to stay on your good side... Certain mad scientists and Technocrats even have special critters or tiny robots who report back to them. Whatever your relationship to these spies might be, however, they could turn against you if you're not careful. Money, magick, better drugs, the threat of torture – all these things and more might flip your spies into someone else's service. And even if they *do* remain loyal to you, your spies can be misled with false data or mistaken impressions of what's really going on. They know only what they're able to see.

Systems-wise, this Trait lets you ferret out information (Intelligence + Spies); circulate misinformation, diversions, and lies (Manipulation + Spies); impress people from a distance (Charisma + Spies); or note potential threats before they solidify (Perception + Spies). A true spymaster can command well above five dots in this Trait, which explains the frightening influence of certain Hermetics, Technocrats, vigilantes, and criminal minds.

X — No special informants.

• — One or two spies in helpful places – the police, the Mob, Wall Street, etc.

•• — Four to six informants in various helpful areas.

••• — A handful of spies in helpful places, plus a few in hard-to-reach areas (the Pentagon, the CIA, the UN, etc.), or one or two in highly secure areas (a Technocratic Symposium, a Tradition Chantry, a classified government bureau, etc.).

•••• — Infiltrators in a whole sphere of influence (the underworld, a nation's government, the international stock market, etc.), or a handful in a Construct, Chantry, vampire clan, werewolf tribe, and so forth.

••••• — Eyes and ears throughout the Sleeper world, or several contacts in the supernatural realm.

••••• • — You've got a small news industry or intelligence agency on your payroll, and it has some perspective on supernatural affairs as well.

••••• •• — Beyond the hundreds of contacts you have in the mortal world, you've got plenty of "friends" scattered throughout the supernatural realm.

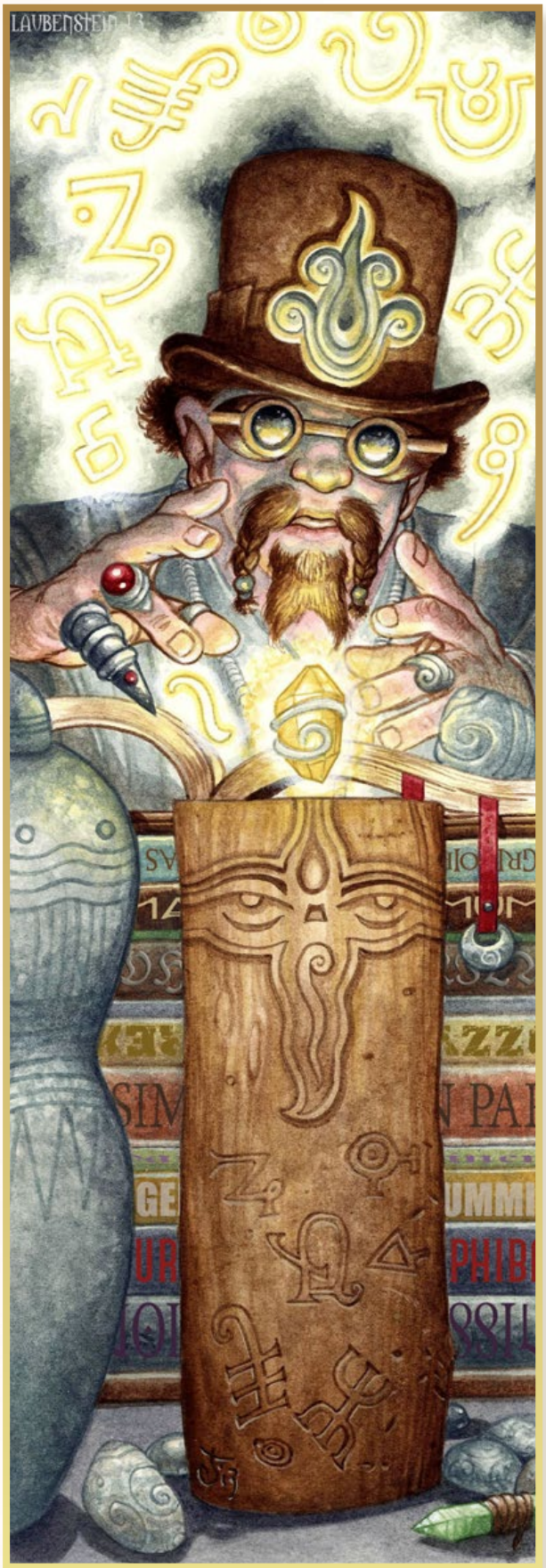
••••• ••• — You've got an entire intelligence agency fielding and processing information for you.

••••• •••• — Big Brother.

••••• ••••• — Big Brother on a global scale.

Status

Respect is important. Fortunately, you enjoy a certain degree of respect within your chosen group. This Background



reflects your overall reputation among your Awakened peers – Virtual Adepts, Templars, Progenitors, etc. At the highest levels of Status (4 and 5), that rep extends to affiliated groups (all the Traditions, Disparate Crafts, Technocracy Conventions) and might extend outside your faction as well. ("*I've heard a lot about you, Mister Leonard – even* here, *we've heard of you...*")

Story-wise, Status gives you a certain amount of respect from associated mages. This, in turn, grants you some deference: folks open doors for you, address you by your desired name and title, send you invitations for special events, and so forth. If you need a small favor, or get involved in a dispute, Status lends your cause a bit of weight.

In game terms, you may add this Background to your dice pool during Social rolls when dealing with your peers; an *admired* Virtual Adept, for instance, would add four dice to her Social rolls among the Adepts. That bonus is halved (round up) among mages from a different but allied sect; the same Adept would get a two-dice bonus among other Traditions. You don't get that bonus among enemies or strangers, though they might acknowledge you in story terms. ("*Our files on you, Ms. Vasquez – or perhaps I should call you 'Voodoo' – are most... impressive...*")

Obviously, Status must be based on something you do or have done. A brand-new mage isn't going to have Status 5 – she'll have to earn it. This Background reflects a reputation among mages, not among Sleepers or other entities, though certain beings in the know (like vampires or spirit-lords) might recognize a Status 4 or 5 mage. Ideally, this Background is granted by the Storyteller as a reward for your actions throughout the chronicle. You can also *lose* Status by failing to live up to it; an agent known for cowardice won't command respect for long...

X	No special status.
•	Acknowledged; your peers recognize your name if it comes up.
••	Credible; you're considered noteworthy.
•••	Respected; your word carries weight.
••••	Admired; most people in your group look up to you.
•••••	Revered; you're considered a paragon of your group's principles.

Totem $

Long before technology gave us little gods, shamans swore pacts with spirit helpers. Each side of such pacts received something in return: the shaman got aid when necessary, and the spirit got a human ally for Earthly matters. These days, a handful of people remember these pacts. The Totem Background reflects such a bargain on your part. *ONLY shamans or medicine workers of some sort can choose this Background Trait.*

Totems, however, are far more than just convenient helpers. Each totem is a powerful spirit archetype – an entity with many forms and faces. Coyote isn't simply an animal; he's a mythic trickster, libidinous and clever, though not especially wise. To be one of Coyote's chosen is to embark on a path of mischief

and misbehavior that undermines authority and fractures limitations. A shaman embraced by Coyote becomes an agent of misrule, whose tricks receive aid from Coyote himself.

Totem spirits aren't in the business of helping human beings; in fact, these days they're not often fond of people at all. To obtain a totem's favor, a person needs to either seek that spirit out in a grueling vision quest or attract that spirit's attention by embodying the totem's essence in her daily life. That Coyote-shaman might have been a bit coyote-like in the first place: tricky and shifty with an anti-authoritarian streak a mile wide... If so, she may have had Coyote's attention all along! Either way, a shaman who wants to bond with her spirit totem will have to journey off into the spirit world (probably while enduring a real-life ordeal) in order to impress that totem with her potential devotion.

Unlike those wizards who compel obedience from spirits, a totem-bound shaman doesn't demand a pact. Nor does she worship the spirit as if it were a god. Instead, the shaman becomes kin to the spirit – essentially a cousin, sibling, or child. That said, a shaman/totem bond can be fractious, argumentative, even insulting. Totems tend to be pretty rough around the edges... and so, for that matter, do most shamans. Both parties understand each other in the cryptic, sometimes blunt manner that families often use... and, like relatives, can speak volumes to each other while hardly saying a word.

In story terms, the totem spirit becomes like a combination of ***Ally*** and ***Patron***, helping your shaman when it suits that totem's wishes to do so. As with other allied characters, this spirit has certain things it wants in return. Typically, those desires combine service ("*Go hunt down the people who killed my wolf-children*") with a ban ("*Do not kill wolves or allow other people to kill them, unless those wolves attack you first*"). Both elements depend on the nature of the totem – Cockroach, for instance, won't have you hunting rabbits or ban you from drinking alcohol. In exchange, the totem instills a bit of its essence – its touch or mark – on its chosen people. A person with a Wolf totem has a fierce yet noble aspect, but one sworn to Cockroach is a tough, if dirty, survivor.

Systems-wise, each dot in Totem gives you a closer connection to a spirit entity: the higher the rating, the deeper the bond. The Background costs *TWO points per dot* (like ***Enhancements*** and ***Sanctum***) and confers an escalating series of benefits:

- **Communication:** A totem can always communicate with its chosen people. Generally, though, this involves omens, dreams, and whispers in your ear. Totems rarely hold conversations with their human kin unless the bond is especially intense (in game terms, Totem 4 or 5). Your totem might get chatty in a dream, but don't expect that to become a habit. Spirits often expect humans to be stupid... and cryptic communications weed out the dummies. If you can't figure out what the totem's saying, after all, why should it bother talking to you at all?

- **Appearance:** Your totem shows up, either in a form that only you can see or – at the higher levels – in a spirit-animal manifestation. These manifestations have the approximate traits of the appropriate animals, although a five-dot Totem could be considerably more powerful if the situation demands a powerful appearance.

- **Ability:** Each totem spirit has certain famous traits: Fox's cleverness, Cat's stealth, Lion's ferocity, and so forth. As a result, the Totem Background gives you additional dice to add to an Ability that's related to that spirit's nature. If you don't have that Ability to begin with, then you're clearly not worthy of the totem's attention! To bond with a totem spirit, you must share something of its nature.

- **Wisdom:** Totems teach their special kin how to deal with the spirit worlds. In game terms, this comes through as dots in either Cosmology, Lore (with a specialty in Spirits), or both.

- **Totem Mark:** As mentioned above, a totem shares a bit of its nature with the shaman... and the shaman probably displayed a bit of that nature even before the bond. Once the bond becomes official, her behavior and appearance favor the totem's nature even more. People who work with spirits will be able to spot the totem's connection to your shaman ("*You've got the look of Raven about you...*") with a successful Perception + Awareness roll. At the upper levels of this Background, though, even Sleepers notice it; they might not *know* what it is that they're seeing, but the shaman feels odd to them. ("*Lady, what's with that coyote-skin head on your backpack... and don't you EVER comb your hair?*")

Because of the differences between human shamans and shamanic werewolves, this Background differs from the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** Background of the same name. (It's also a revision of the Background presented in **The Spirit Ways**, which resembled the **Werewolf** one.) As with Backgrounds like Fame, Resources, Status, and so forth, you must maintain your totem bond and keep your spirit-kin happy. Otherwise, you could lose dots in this Trait... possibly losing Totem completely. This Background works well with Allies, Blessing, Familiar, and Legend; it might be tied to certain Merits or Flaws as well. Those Traits, of course, must still be purchased separately.

As mentioned above, *only shamanic or medicine-working characters may have the Totem Background*. Technocrats – being dead to the spirits – cannot *ever* bond with a totem spirit other than two specific exceptions: ***The Man*** and ***The Machine***. Certain spirit-oriented technomancers, however, might bond with tech-oriented totems. Hermetics, Choristers, and other monotheistic, high-ritual types are generally considered too bossy or antagonistic to win a totem spirit's affection. For a variety of potential spirit guides and their associated characteristics, check out the ***Totem Spirits*** section of **Appendix I**, **(pp. 633-636)**.

X No totem spirit bond.

• Your totem appears in dreams and visions and offers one additional die to your normal pool for an Ability (Athletics, Stealth, Survival, etc.) that's related to the totem spirit's nature.

•• The totem speaks to you, offering occasional cryptic advice and omens, plus two dice that can be used for that related Ability.

••• Your spirit guide appears in your waking life, though only to you and to other folks who can see spirits. The totem gives you advice, sends omens, occasionally manifests a spirit animal for non-combat errands, grants two dice to use on that related Ability, and gives you one dot in Cosmology or Lore.

•••• A powerful bond allows your totem to manifest in solid form. That spirit offers frequent advice and omens, gives you three dice to use in the appropriate Ability, confers two dots in either Cosmology or Lore, and might help you in a desperate combat situation (as an Ally would) in exchange for a huge favor afterward. Among spirits and spirit-working people, you're clearly favored by your totem and display obvious signs of that bond in your appearance and behavior.

••••• Your totem loves you! In dreams, visions, omens, and solid form, that spirit provides frequent company and aid. You get three dice toward the appropriate Ability, add two dots each in Cosmology and Spirit Lore, and may receive help in desperate situations. Your bond to that spirit is obvious to anyone and marks you as a very strange, primal, and probably intimidating person.

Wonder (Device/ Fetish/ Talisman, etc.)

A wonder by any name is still as sweet... and you have one. What's a Wonder? Perhaps it's a mystic Talisman imbued with magickal power; a Fetish whose strange properties come from a spirit bound within its form; or a Technocratic or weird-science Device, shaped by Enlightened Science into something that transcends mortal technology. In game terms, a Wonder is simply an item with Sphere Effects of its own. Although such items, with a few exceptions, usually work only for mages, the Wonder's form and function depend on the people who created it and the methods involved in its creation.

So long as your Storyteller agrees, a Wonder can be anything: an oak branch carved with Nordic runes, a plasma cannon, a robotic SUV, a bank card that skims money from every account held by that bank, an enchanted guitar, an owl -feather pen that writes in any human language... the Wonder's form and function can, within limits, be whatever you want them to be. Certain terms (*Fetish*, *Device*, etc.) define particular types of items. The ***Toybox*** section of **Appendix II** **(see pp. 651-653)** features details, rules, and an array of sample Wonders.

Wonders can be temperamental... especially Fetishes, whose guiding spirits have personalities of their own. Even Devices, however, can seem uncannily stubborn, as anyone with a finicky car or computer can attest. They tend to have odd effects on the people who use them, especially mages who rely upon Wonders the way Elric of Melniboné relies upon his sword Stormbringer. In many cases, Wonders have elaborate backstories about their creation, history, and deeds. If your character begins play with a Wonder, work out an intriguing history and description of that item, then pass it off to your Storyteller for approval and further elaboration. Chances are, your Wonder will have secrets you won't know about. Ideally, a Wonder is more than a simple "magic item"; instead, it's a miracle in material form – solid proof of magick's reality.

X No items of power.

• A Wonder with one small power – that is, a Wonder worth 1-3 points.

•• A Wonder with one or two powers, probably with some Quintessence and an Arete of its own. (4-6 points.)

••• A Wonder with a few notable powers or one respectable one. (7-9 points.)

•••• A Wonder with impressive powers or a powerful Effect. (10-12 points.)

••••• A Wonder with mighty powers or a single devastating Effect. (13-15 points.)

Arete/ Enlightenment

Excellence. No other word typifies the ultimate goal of a mage than that. No mage, regardless of affiliation, is just another person. Each mage is excellent in his or her way. And so Arete – correctly pronounced *Ahr-eh-TAY*, though often rendered *AIR-eh-tay* – epitomizes the core of True Magick and those who employ it.

Mages, as usual, disagree about what Arete actually *is*. Many shamans regard it as a connection to the World-Soul, and scientists consider it the heart of one's inner genius. Akashayana speak of the enlightenment one gains through harmony with the Way, and Syndicate tycoons realize that certain people are just *born* superior to the Masses. Although the Traditions have agreed to use the Classical Greek word Arete as a touchstone term, Technocrats prefer the more straightforward **Enlightenment**, or simply Excellence. Various Disparate groups employ their own terms, but regardless of the specific language or culture, the connotation of perfection is always there.

X Sleeper

• Initiated

•• Talented

••• Schooled

•••• Disciplined

••••• Commanding

••••• • Masterful

••••• •• Understanding

Zafira's Lament: Example of Arete, Spheres, and Willpower

Eva's playing Zafira Angelita – a punk-ass Celestial Chorus demon hunter. Zafira starts off with Arete 3, Willpower 5. Her Spheres – Forces, Prime, Spirit, and Time – cannot go above 3 until Eva raises that Arete rating above 3. Zafira undergoes a Seeking, and so her Arete rises to 4. Now Eva rolls four dice, not three, when casting Zafira's Effects, and may buy her Spheres up to Rank 4.

After a series of horrific events, Zafira's permanent Willpower drops to 3. Now Eva's limited to *three* dice, not four, when casting Zafira's magicks. Until Zafira manages to get her Willpower back up to 4 or higher, Eva cannot raise any of her Spheres above 3. And if Zafira had Forces 4 at the point where she lost her Willpower, she'd be limited to Forces 3 until her Willpower gets restored. Even if Zafira experiences another Seeking and raises her Arete to 5, her Spheres and casting roll are still limited by her permanent Willpower rating of 3.

••••• ••• Wise
••••• •••• Enlightened
••••• ••••• Transcendent

Game Effects of Arete

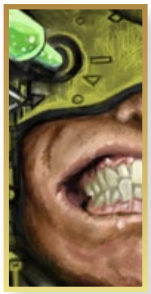
- Arete reflects your character's ability to change reality to suit her intentions. You roll one die for each dot in this Trait when you're casting Effects. The higher your Arete, the more you can accomplish. (See **Chapter Ten** for details.)
- Your Arete also defines your magick's potential. You cannot have a Sphere ranked higher than your Arete rating.
- Magic demands a combination of Enlightenment and Will. If your *permanent* (not temporary) Willpower Trait drops, or remains, lower than your Arete, then both your Spheres and your magick casting rolls are limited to your *Willpower* level, not your Arete level.
- To raise your Arete, your character needs to undergo a *Seeking*. This vision quest forces him to face and overcome inner obstacles. If and when he does so, he grows more enlightened; at that point, you can buy another dot of Arete to reflect his growing excellence. For details, see the ***Seekings*** entries in **Chapter One** (p. 44) and **Chapter Seven** (pp. 367-369).

Arete, Focus, and Instruments

- At Arete 1 and 2, a mage must focus his Arts through a paradigm, a practice, and at least seven instruments based upon that style.
- Mystic mages begin to realize that magick comes from internal excellence, not from external focus. Beginning at Arete 3, a mystic mage can begin to discard the instruments she uses to focus her magickal style. Although she doesn't *have* to stop using her tools, she can discard one instrument per dot in Arete over the second: one instrument at Arete 3, two at Arete 4, three at Arete 5, and so on. By Arete 9, she will have outgrown the need for instruments, thus become magick *herself*.
- Technomancers cannot discard instruments until they reach Arete 6; at that point, they can set aside a single instrument. This provides a breakthrough; from Arete 7 onward, a Technomancer can set aside *two* instruments per dot in Arete. Again, by Arete 9, the mage will have transcended the need for an external focus.
- Thanks to thorough indoctrination, members of the Technocracy *cannot transcend their focus at all*. Until and unless he leaves the Technocratic Union entirely and embraces a new belief system – as the Society of Ether and Virtual Adepts have done – a Technocrat remains bound to the idea that his tools allow him to do what he does. At Arete 10, a Technocrat assumes that he, his instruments, and his approach to science are all one integrated whole. Technocratic oracles are essentially ghosts in the Machine: human consciousness incarnated in technology.

For details, see ***Focus and the Arts*** in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 565-600).

Willpower



You must have *Will* in order to *do*. Thus, mages are very willful people. Just as a mage cannot unlock the doors to magick without understanding her ability to use it, so she cannot bend reality to her intentions without enough will to command it. The Willpower Trait reflects your mage's vision, confidence, and determination. And so, even when she's running low on self-assurance, her core Willpower remains unusually strong.

X	Spineless
•	Weak
••	Timid
•••	Insecure
••••	Secure
•••••	Certain
••••• •	Confident
••••• ••	Strong
••••• •••	Controlled
••••• ••••	Unshaken
••••• •••••	Unbreakable

Game Effects of Willpower

- Willpower has two elements: *the permanent Willpower Trait* (tracked in boxes on the character sheet) and *the temporary Willpower pool* (tracked in circles). When you spend Willpower points, erase dots from the Willpower pool; when you make a Willpower roll, base it on the permanent Trait.
- As mentioned above under ***Arete***, your magickal ability is limited by your permanent Willpower Trait.
- To push beyond your character's normal limits, you can spend temporary Willpower points.
- By acting according to your character's Nature (see the ***Archetypes*** section earlier in this chapter), you can refresh those spent points and restore your Willpower pool to its normal confident state.
- Mages start off with a base of Willpower 5 and go upward from there. Most other characters range between Willpower 1 and 10, with average folks being between 2 and 4.

Using Willpower

- By spending a point of Willpower, you can get one automatic success for a single action. You may spend only one Willpower point per turn this way, but you can use several Willpower points to gain successes over the course of an *extended action*. See **Chapter Eight**, (p. 389), for details.
- When your mage botches a casting roll or faces a Paradox backlash, you can avert the pending backlash by willing it not to happen. This costs a Willpower point and results in the automatic failure of whatever your mage was trying to do at the time. The Paradox doesn't hit you at the time, although the Paradox points that would have been unleashed remain on your character sheet... adding up... waiting for another opportunity to blow you into next week. This dodge works only once per casting. See ***Staving Off Disaster***, under ***The Paradox Effect*** section in **Chapter Ten**, (p. 549).
- By rolling your Willpower Trait rating, you can help your mage resist the effects of Mind Sphere magick. Successes on that roll subtract from the successes rolled on the Mind attack. The roll's difficulty is usually 6, although a particularly potent or subtle attack might raise that difficulty at the Storyteller's discretion. Botching this roll might end up costing you a *permanent* Willpower point. Mages and other supernatural creatures get this resistance roll for free, but Sleepers must spend a Willpower point in order to resist Mind magick this way. See ***Resisting Psychic Assaults*** in **Chapter Ten**, (p. 544).
- A point of Willpower can also dispel a delusion brought on by Quiet. This requires a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 7, or perhaps higher) as well as that point of Willpower. An unsuccessful roll will spend the Willpower point without holding back the delusions. Success also dispels a single point of Paradox. Essentially, your mage asserts control over the visions in his head... at least for the moment. (See ***Rising Out of Quiet*** in **Chapter Ten**, (p. 556).
- You can spend a point of Willpower to ignore all wound-based penalties, up to but *not including* Incapacitation, for one turn per point. Essentially, your mage pushes past the pain to accomplish an action or two before giving in to those injuries. See ***Health and Injury*** in **Chapter Nine**, (pp. 406-409).
- On a similar note, you can spend a point of Willpower to resist an overwhelming urge or compulsion – the urge to run, for example, from a furious demigod, or to surrender to sleep after days without rest. If that urge or situation continues, though, you may need to spend more Willpower in order to keep going. And in the face of some awful challenge – say, in order to laugh while under torture – you may need to spend Willpower points even if you, the player, had not planned to do so. It's easy for *players* to remain blasé about shattering traumas, but for *characters*, that kind of fortitude is harder to come by and more costly to maintain.

Losing Willpower

Sanity-breaking ordeals – grotesque torture, intimate betrayal, confrontation with a Horror Beyond Madness, and similar excruciations – can cost your mage a *permanent* point of Willpower. This sort of thing shouldn't happen often, but in the dark world of the Awakened, such traumas seem inevitable. Willpower points lost this way can be regained only through intense roleplaying and elaborate stories associated with that character's breaking and renewal.

The following circumstances might cost you a point or two of permanent Willpower. No event should cost a mage more than two Willpower points at a time – mages are pretty damned tough!

- A mage who suffers an intense shock (heartbreak, torture, screaming horror, etc.) while his Willpower pool sits at one or zero loses a point of permanent Willpower.
- Prolonged mental, physical, and emotional agony can destroy a character's permanent Willpower if he continues past the point of endurance (Willpower 0). Truly awful ordeals may totally break that character by gradually reducing permanent Willpower to 0 over a period of time. Nephandi tormenters, fanatical witch-hunters, and NWO PsychOps specialize in this sort of thing...
- A disastrous Seeking, extended Quiet, or long-term imprisonment in a Paradox Realm can have the same effect. Normally, such ordeals cost only one point of permanent Willpower; if they go on for a long time, though, the effects can be shattering.
- The death of a ***Familiar/Companion*** (as per that Background Trait) costs the mage one point of permanent Willpower.

For details, see the sidebar ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** in **Chapter Nine**, (p. 407).

Regaining Willpower

Rest and success restore a person's self-confidence. The following events allow you to replenish points spent from your character's Willpower pool:

- At the end of a successful story (not a game session), the characters regain *all* the Willpower they've spent during the course of that adventure. If that story went poorly, the Storyteller may decide to limit restored Willpower to half of the full pool until the heroes have had a chance to set things right.
- If a character achieves some special success – rescuing a stranger, saving a sacred grove, stomping a vampire into immortal ashes – the rush of victory can restore a point or two of Willpower.
- When your mage fulfills some element of his Nature, he gets a point or two of Willpower. The events, however, must be played out – they can't conveniently occur offstage.
- The ***Destiny*** Background allows you to regain spent Willpower. See that Trait entry for details.
- A good night's (or day's) sleep restores a point of Willpower, assuming that your character has had a decent chance to rest. This works only once per day and doesn't kick in if the mage doesn't have much chance to recharge her sense of self.

Quintessence and Paradox

The wheel of Quintessence and Paradox reflects the interplay of opposing energies. The first reflects your connection to the essential substance of the cosmos, and the second reflects your separation from consensual reality. Your Avatar stores Quintessence, but Paradox cancels out that essential energy. Life for an active mage involves a constant ebb and flow of both energies; plenty of Quintessence grants him greater control over his Arts, but excessive Paradox makes him a hazard to himself and everyone nearby.

The Quintessence/ Paradox Wheel

- On the Quintessence/ Paradox wheel, you fill in your permanent Quintessence rating (one point for each dot in your Avatar Background) in the squares from the left-hand marker going clockwise up the wheel.
- Paradox starts at the same mark, but runs counterclockwise across the bottom of the wheel. If you have permanent Paradox points (see the ***Enhancement*** Background), then mark those points on the wheel in ink – they never go away.
- If Paradox and Quintessence meet in the middle and then begin to overlap, then Paradox cancels out Quintessence. Quintessence does not cancel out Paradox; if that Trait reaches the Paradox points, then you stop absorbing Quintessence.
- Because the two Traits may overlap, we recommend using different marks to represent them – maybe checks for Quintessence and Xs for Paradox. Except in the case of permanent Paradox, use a pencil, not ink, to mark those points.

Game Effects of Quintessence

- You can spend Quintessence to reduce the difficulty of a magick casting roll. Each point spent reduces that difficulty by 1, to a maximum reduction of -3.
- That said, the amount of Quintessence you can spend at one time is limited by your mage's Avatar Trait. A character with Avatar 2, for example, may spend or absorb only two Quintessence points within a single turn.
- Your mage can also use Quintessence to counter Paradox or fuel countermagick. See ***Prime 5*** (p. 521) and ***Countermagick*** in **Chapter Ten**, (p. 545) for details.
- A mage can absorb Quintessence through her Avatar; through Prime Sphere spells or Procedures; or through Tass or some Wonder that recharges Quintessence, like a battery or energy drink.
- Channeling Quintessence through the Avatar requires meditation at a Node; channeling more than your Avatar rating through that Node requires Prime 1. To absorb Quintessence energy from the materialized Quintessence of Tass requires Prime 3. A Master can absorb Quintessence from *anywhere* by using a vulgar Prime 5 Effect. The number of Quintessence points that can be absorbed this way depend upon the success on the magick casting roll – see the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***, **Chapter Ten**, (p. 504).
- The Quintessence absorbed by your mage's Avatar essentially becomes personal Quintessence and cannot be taken away from her – only spent *by* her. Your Avatar Background rating reflects the maximum amount of personal Quintessence you can store.
- In most cases, Quintessence remains invisible except to mages with the Prime Sphere. Characters with Awareness or other metaphysical perception abilities might *feel* Quintessence being shunted around, but they won't be able to see it the way a Prime-skilled mage could. When respectable amounts of Quintessence (three points or more) get shifted around, lights tend to dim, breezes blow, and the area's temperature might rise or fall several degrees. Folks feel ripples even if they have no idea what's actually going on.
- Large or violent reality shifts that move around 10 points of Quintessence or more *do* become visible to mortal eyes. Bright lights, ribbons of color, explosions, sudden freezes, and so forth mark such disruptions. Effects at that level tear the fabric of the Tapestry, and so they're *always* considered vulgar magick.

For details about the magick rules in general, see **Chapter Ten**.

Optional Rule: Resonance

Because magick is an extension of the mage who uses it, that mage's deeds and intentions manifest as Resonance. As explained in earlier chapters, this force colors Quintessence, Paradox, magick, and occasionally even the mage herself. In extreme cases, this energy creates echoes (as per the ***Echoes*** Flaw – see **Appendix II**, **(pp. 646-647)**, that can make a willworker stand out even when he's trying to appear mundane.

Mage Revised presented Resonance as a character Trait. Earlier editions of **Mage** had not done so. Given the various and contradicting depictions of Resonance throughout **Mage**'s history, this Trait is considered an extremely *optional rule*.

If your group chooses to employ Resonance and the related phenomenon called *Synergy* as Traits, the following scale represents the strength of a character's Resonance and/ or Synergy Trait:

X	Faint Resonance
•	Quirky
• •	Odd
• • •	Noticeable
• • • •	Influential
• • • • •	Unmistakable

For details about ***Resonance and Synergy***, see the entry of that name in **Chapter Ten** **(pp. 560-561)**.

Game Effects of Paradox

- Each time a mage employs vulgar magick, he gets *at least* one point of Paradox. For details, see ***Step Four – Results: What Happens?*** on the ***Casting Magickal Effects chart*** in **Chapter Ten** (p. 501).
- Botching a magickal Effect also gathers Paradox, as noted on that same ***Casting Magickal Effects chart***.
- Large amounts of Paradox energy can backlash on the mage, with hideous results – warped spells, explosions, insanity, and so forth. See ***The Paradox Effect*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 547-553) for the grisly details.
- Your mage's Paradox rating becomes his *Paradox pool*. When things go horribly wrong with her magick, the Storyteller rolls one die per point in that pool in order to see what happens. Thus, you'll want to keep that Trait as low as possible; the higher the pool, the worse its effects.
- A mage who builds up a bit of Paradox energy can bleed it off by avoiding magick for a little while. For details, see ***Shedding Paradox*** in **Chapter Ten** (p. 549).
- If your mage accumulates 20 points or more without a backlash, she may drop into an intense Quiet, disappear through a crack in reality (possibly to return as a warped Marauder version of the person she once was), or simply explode.
- Certain modifications can give a character a permanent Paradox rating. For details, see the ***Enhancements*** Background entry, the ***Permanent Paradox*** entry in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 547-548), and ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**.
- Mages who store up large amounts of Paradox energy become walking blights upon reality. They manifest odd quirks of Resonance, display disturbing *Paradox Flaws*, and simply don't feel right to other people. Although very few creatures will understand the nature of the problem, they'll instinctually avoid a 'Doxy wizard, if only out of self-preservation.

For other details about ***The Paradox Effect*** and ***Quiet***, see those entries in **Chapter Ten**.

Health

For all their powers, mages are mortal. When you prick them, they bleed. When you drop them off buildings, they go splat. The *Health* Trait measures the distance between a master of reality and a slab at the local morgue.

When the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune turn your mage into a bleeding hunk of enlightened hamburger, those attacks mark off levels from your Health Trait. An uninjured character has eight Health Levels to lose; after the first two (the *Uninjured* default and the *Bruised* Health Level), that character starts to suffer penalties to his dice pools. The worse his injuries, the harder it is for him to accomplish anything. Pain and damage take their mortal toll, and if those penalties exceed the character's dice pool for a given activity, then that character can't perform the task at all.

The exception here is the Arete roll. Unless a willworker is rendered *Incapacitated* or is unconscious, he can still call upon his Arete and Spheres, assuming he's still got enough Willpower left to use them.

Life magick and other forms of treatment can heal these injuries; even then, however, pain and damage leave lasting effects. A person who gets her arm ripped off is going to remember the experience. Sure, she could re-grow that limb with potent spells, but the trauma will leave scars – physical, yes, but also emotional and psychological – that defy even magick's healing power. Although you don't need to roleplay the lasting terrors of every little paper-cut, significant injuries should have long-term story-based effects.

Bashing, Lethal, and Aggravated Damage

Injuries inflict three different kinds of damage, depending on the nature of the attack:

- *Bashing damage* (marked on your character sheet with a "/ ") represents the bruising effects of fists, short falls, and other forms of blunt force trauma. Mages can try to tough it out by *soaking* this sort of damage with a Stamina roll. For details, see ***Soaking Damage*** in the ***Combat*** section of **Chapter Nine** (pp. 412-413).
- *Lethal damage* (marked with an "X") reflects slashes, cuts, gunshot wounds, crushing, and other injuries that could probably kill you. For the most part, *mages CANNOT soak this type of damage* without special armor, magickally

tough skin, or other forms of protection beyond normal human frailty. They may, however, heal it with the appropriate magick or technology.

- *Aggravated damage* (marked with an "*") represents massive trauma – werewolf claws, vampire fangs, raging fires, and the metaphysical injuries inflicted by destruction of a person's essential Pattern through magick or other paranormal means. Mages can't soak this type of damage without special protection either (remember that when you sass a werewolf...), and even Masters of Life find such injuries exceptionally difficult to heal.

For more details about injuries, healing, and the Health Trait, see **Health and Injury** in **Chapter Nine** (pp. 406-409).

Part III: Character Progress

So there you are – fresh character sheet in hand, a new-minted mage ready for action. The chronicle starts, the tale begins, the adventures unfold...

Now what?

Once your chronicle's underway, your characters will change and grow. The challenges they face and overcome, even the ones that bowl them over and leave 'em weeping, will transform your mages from initiated upstarts to experienced agents of change. So as the Fragile Path takes them from Awakening to Ascension, the following steps will help you chart their progress throughout the game.

Experience Points

People grow and change, learning new things and improving the skills they already possess. In game terms, your characters earn *experience points*: points that let you raise their Traits or buy new ones to reflect the things they learn as they progress.

At the end of each *chapter* (a game session) of your chronicle, the Storyteller gives experience points based on that session's accomplishments; at the climax of a particular story arc, the players get a few bonus points to reflect the things they've done and learned over the course of that tale. The more things that you and your character do, and the better you do them, the more points you get. This way, your characters improve by being active within the story, and the players get rewarded for being creative within the game. Conversely, a player whose character does little or nothing in the course of the game progresses very slowly, if at all. It's in each player's best interests, then, to play each character to the hilt.

End of Each Chapter

As you wrap up each chapter, the Storyteller awards a few experience points based on the following accomplishments:

One Point – Automatic: Each character gets some small degree of experience from simply having faced the challenges of that session's events.

One Point – Learning Curve: Characters who've truly learned something new, important, or significant to the plot or their personal stories can earn a point to reflect how that knowledge has expanded their horizons. To earn that point, though, the player should explain why that knowledge changed her character's world.

One Point – Roleplaying: A player who goes above and beyond the group's usual level of roleplaying should be rewarded with an extra point for exploring his character, delving into his backstory, following his quirks or Archetype even when the *player* realizes that his character's making a mistake, and so on. Excellence, after all, shouldn't simply be a trait that only mages can enjoy! Of course, a really good group will keep raising the bar for exceptional roleplaying – but seriously, that's not a bad thing at all!

One Point – Focus: Because belief and practice are so important to a mage, a player who really gets into the *way* her character performs magick – who plays up that mage's beliefs, details her practices, and uses her instruments in cleverly appropriate ways – may get a point for emphasizing the mage's approach to the Arts and Sciences. This way, your chronicle focuses less on "Life 3/ Prime 2, difficulty 6" and more on telling a cool story about people whose faith moves their world.

One Point – Heroism: A character who faces incredible odds to perform some memorable act of sacrifice or risk ought to be rewarded for stepping up courageously and doing what needed to be done. Heroes, as we saw earlier, are folks whose deeds are worth singing about, and that sort of risk deserves rewards. That which does not kill us, after all, is worth experience points!

End of the Story

At the tail end of a self-contained story arc, the Storyteller gives out a few extra experience points to reward a job well done. Obviously, there'll be more points awarded if the adventure was a success. Even failure, though, can be instructive. If nothing else, the School of Hard Knocks teaches you what *not* to do next time!

One Point – Success: Everyone involved in the adventure gets an extra point at the end of that story, assuming that they met their major goals and gained a sort of victory.

One Point – Danger: If the characters faced major hazards – harrowing temptations, trips to the Hell of Being Flayed Alive, fights in which survival was seriously in doubt – they might gain an extra point for surviving the tale. Note that this needs to be an above and beyond sort of situation. Mages are always in *some* form of danger. If the threat had a good chance of ending their journey forever, though, the surviving heroes might benefit from coming through it intact.

One Point – Wisdom: If your mage used beyond-the-call-of-duty cleverness, then he ought to be rewarded for using his

head. Again, this needs to be a situation where things could have gone seriously sideways if that character hadn't shown sudden insight, wit, or intellect. Mages are *expected* to be smart, so this bonus point should be earned only by exceptional brilliance.

One Point – Drama: The Storyteller can, of course, decide to give out extra points for especially deep roleplaying, dramatic self-sacrifice, or other memorable moments. **Mage**, after all, is a collaborative storytelling experience, and great stories deserve great rewards.

Experience Costs

Trait	Cost
Current Ability	3
Current Sphere	10
Affinity Sphere	current rating x 7
Other Sphere	current rating x 8
Arete	current rating x 8
Attribute	current rating x 4
Ability	3
Background*	current rating x 3
Willpower	current rating x 1

**Might not be available with experience points – see sidebar.*

Raising and Learning Traits

When your character uses her Attributes and Abilities, she gets a chance to improve them. In game terms, you take the experience points you've earned and spend them to raise the appropriate Traits. If Jinx gets into lots of fights over the course of an adventure or learns some new tricks from Synder or Khan, it makes sense that her Brawl and Melee Traits would improve.

Different Traits have different costs... and those costs usually go up as you get better with a given Trait. Once you're good at something, after all, it gets harder to top what you've already done before. Certain Traits, like Spheres, are especially expensive; the higher levels require more learning and expertise to master than the beginning levels had demanded... and so, in game terms, they cost a lot more time and experience to raise.

In order to raise a Trait, your character needs to do something in the story that would improve it. You can't raise your Computer Knowledge, for instance, if your mage hasn't been anywhere near a computer during this story. Raising an Attribute demands some serious exercise with the Trait in question – long hours at the gym, for example, to raise your Strength, lots of brain-games and study to raise your Wits, or practice refining your senses in order to raise Perception beyond its original level. Life Sphere magick and cybernetic implants can make certain improvements possible – see the ***Enhancement*** Background and the entry for the ***Life Sphere*** in **Chapter Ten**. In any case, there has to be a *reason* behind that raised Attribute or Ability.

In no case can you raise a Trait by more than one dot at a time; sure, Jinx might be scrappy as hell, but she's not going to jump from *Schoolyard-Brawler* level to *Kick-Jet-Li's-Ass* level overnight. Beyond that, your Storyteller needs to approve raised Traits – you can suggest, "*Hey, I'd love to buy another dot in Brawl for Jinx because she's been in lots of fights this chapter*," but the Storyteller makes the final call about the Trait itself.

(**Note:** Storytellers, don't be douchebags about this sort of thing. If there's a reasonable in-game explanation, then let the player raise her Trait unless there's some compelling reason not to allow it.)

Buying New Traits

Beyond that, you can also buy new Traits to reflect things your character learns over the course of his adventures. Again, you'll need a story-based reason behind that new Trait – lessons from a mentor, dedicated lab-time, that sort of thing – and this process demands opportunity, time, and practice. A phrase book, for example, will teach you only so much about speaking Greek; if you want a working vocabulary, you'll have to practice *using* it too... preferably with real Greeks.

Even with all the right factors in place, it takes time and effort to gain a practical knowledge of new things. The amount of time involved really depends on what it is you're trying to learn and could range from a few days to a month or more. It's

Optional Rule: Raising and Buying Backgrounds With Experience Points

As mentioned earlier under the ***Backgrounds*** section, these Traits could not originally be raised with experience points, only by events within the chronicle. **Mage Revised** changed that rule, so the final decision rests with your Storyteller.

Under this *optional rule*, players can raise certain Background Traits, but not all of them. It makes sense to improve certain Backgrounds with experience points: *Allies, Backup, Chantry, Contacts, Enhancements, Influence, Library, Sanctum,* and *Spies* all seem like Traits a person could improve through a little extra investment. (*Enhancement* and *Sanctum* would cost double the usual amount.) Other Backgrounds, however – *Arcane, Avatar, Destiny, Dream, Familiar, Mentor, Node, Patron, Resources, Requisitions, Secret Weapons, Totem,* and *Wonder* – ought to remain outside a player's control, raised only through the events of the story. It's too easy to simply allow a player to buy new dots in Resources, for example, and then wind up with her dominating the game through financial power. If you, as the Storyteller, decide to allow players to purchase or raise their Background Traits with experience points, please consider how certain Backgrounds can upend the game if their value depends on points spent at a player's discretion.

pretty easy to pick up some basic cooking skills, for example; learning conversational Mandarin if you're an English-speaker, though? That'll take a bit longer.

Raising or Learning Spheres

Mages are sponges for knowledge, so, in many cases, new skills come easily to them. New *Spheres*, on the other hand, are far more difficult to learn. Beyond the challenges involved in learning the principles behind whole aspects of reality, there's the matter of belief and practice. A mad scientist, for example, won't be able to learn much from a witch about the Life Sphere – their approaches to that Sphere are too alien for one another's comprehension. Sure, he can teach her about plasmodic variables and she can teach him about calling the corners, but they'll probably spend more time telling one another *how utterly WRONG you are* than they will actually learning anything from one another. This goes triple for members of the Traditions or Technocracy who try to learn one another's techniques. Even if you could get two such rivals to sit still in the same room long enough to listen to one another, they'd both be trying to overcome their ingrained resistance to the other's ideas about reality. In short, then, it doesn't work.

In order to learn a new Sphere, or improve the ones you have, your mage will need to study with someone whose magickal focus is more or less the same as your character's own. Generally, this means studying with a member of your Tradition, Convention, or sect, then applying the lessons to suit your individual approach. Such learning takes significant amounts of *downtime* – the time characters spend offstage in between adventures –dedicated to learning and practicing new principles and techniques. **(See *What Do You Do During Downtime?* in Chapter Eight, p. 385.)** And although a mage *can* learn things from different sects, that knowledge can take two, three, or even five times as long as it would have taken if he'd been studying with a member of his own group.

Apprenticeship

Obviously, you can't learn much about the higher levels of knowledge from mentors who know less than you do. Personal exploration, meanwhile, will get you only so far. Most people – mages in particular – wind up studying with someone who's really good at the subject in question. This leads, in many cases, to *apprenticeships*: relationships wherein an experienced teacher agrees to pass on knowledge to a student in exchange for fees or services.

Apprenticeship has a long, respected history in Awakened circles. Many groups – particularly the Hermetic Order, lineage-based witchcraft sects, clerical orders, and most Technocratic Conventions – will not accept a member who *hasn't* served an apprenticeship with an established member of that group. Such apprenticeship may be kind and nurturing, harsh and brutal, even what would commonly be called abusive. Although it's less common in this modern, more democratic age, traditional apprenticeships usually involve complete obedience, servitude, and deference to the master in all matters.

Even now, though, ancient traditions die hard, and mentors who follow the old ways can be remorseless taskmasters.

And so, in the course of your character's story, he might enter an apprenticeship to learn a new Trait, improve his knowledge, or both. He might well be in such a relationship at the start of the chronicle (see the ***Mentor*** Background) or have recently left it under good or not-so-good circumstances. In any case, there's a story involved, especially if your mentor is still engaged with your character's instruction. That relationship will make a vast impression on your character's approach to life, magick, and everything. Even if he rejects the mentor's guidance, the things he's learned from her will, for better and worse, shape the mage he will become.

Avatar and Genius

And then there's the inner mentor: the Genius or Avatar who guides your mage's Path. As we've already seen, that can be a complex relationship that no one else will share. As your mage advances along her Path, that relationship might grow and change. The Avatar may become more insistent and demanding, pushing the mage to new extremes in pursuit of Ascension or a Fall.

Part of the Avatar's role involves challenge; without challenges, after all, we don't grow. And so, even the most subtle, agreeable Genius will nag your mage toward new accomplishments and potential failures. A truly strong Avatar (one rated at 4 or 5) can be a terror – a literal demon, perhaps, that drives the mage night and day. Your mage's Essence determines the sort of challenges it gives you. A Dynamic spirit ignites passions, a Static one demands perfection, a Questing one tugs you to pursue new avenues of experience, and a Primal one presents constant enigmas and puzzles that apparently defy solutions. In many ways, the Avatar is an internal mentor... one that never goes away.

Seekings

At crisis points, your Avatar can drop your mage into *Seekings*: the metaphysical journeys that push you past your comfort zone and force you to confront obstacles that block your Path. Sometimes this pops up unexpectedly – in the middle of a dark night of the soul, for example, while your mage questions her beliefs and actions. At other points, a mage chooses to undergo the Seeking, facing up to those challenges in order to grow. Each Seeking is an internal matter. Your companions won't join you there except perhaps as figments of your mage's imagination.

In game terms, your mage needs to go Seeking whenever you want to purchase a point of Arete. **Chapter Seven** features more details about the Seeking process from the Storyteller's perspective. In the game itself, you can either play out a Seeking as a sort of solo adventure, or else simply let the Storyteller tell you how things went when you go to raise that Trait. Ideally, though, you'll play out your Seekings, if only as short interludes in a larger story. By winning Arete through symbolic internal challenges – challenges that you

could potentially *lose*, and thus delay that next point of Arete until you pass the test – you turn that magick-roll Trait into a vital part of your mage's life story.

Changing Focus and Allegiance

Some challenges force people to change the things that matter most to them. Even mages, whose beliefs bend reality itself, can lose their faith and accept another Path. Most times, this process helps the mage transcend her reliance upon rituals and tools – the growth of Arete that lets you put those tools aside. Occasionally, though, a mage can face a radical conversion and become a different sort of mage altogether.

Changing sides isn't always difficult. The Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts defected from the Technocracy without changing much about their overall approach to the Enlightened Arts. Nephandi convert rival willworkers so insidiously that few people notice the change of allegiance until it's too late. Mages who shift from one group to another without changing their essential beliefs about magick and technology can do so easily. Let's say that Malcolm Jamal Leonard gets won over by his Syndicate boss; his approach to the Art of Desire doesn't really change, just the way he puts it to use. Ah, but if he were to convert to the Society of Ether, his focus – the beliefs, practices, and tools behind his Arts – would change rather radically.

In such cases, assume that your character adopts an entirely new focus – a fresh paradigm, practice, and set of instruments. He doesn't lose Arete, but he must begin with *at least seven tools from that practice*, regardless of his previous accomplishments. After all, he's learning an entirely new way of doing things, with all the doubts and questions that come with such transformation. For at least a story arc or two (several game months, in any case), *his Spheres will function at half their usual level, with the exception of his affinity Sphere*. Again, he's learning a whole new way of doing things, though some principles will come more easily than others. Eventually, he'll regain his old power with a new understanding of how such things work; once he does, he can begin shedding tools (say, at a rate of roughly one instrument per story arc) until he reaches the level he had enjoyed before his radical conversion.

Such transformations have *massive* roleplaying potential: angst and brooding and tearful confessions and full-out fights with the people your mage holds dear – it's the sort of stuff roleplayers live for. So if your character shifts focus, allegiance, or both, play that shift for maximum drama. It's a *HUGE* event in the life of a mage, and it can provide those coveted drama bonus points when that story comes to an end and a new one begins...

Nature and Demeanor

On a similar note, a character can change her Archetype as well. People *do* change over time, so it's reasonable to allow shifts of Demeanor or even Nature over the course of a chronicle. Given the right reasons, a reckless Trickster could become a selfless Martyr, a brooding Rogue, or even a repentant Prophet.

Changing Demeanor is easy: the character simply acts differently toward other people. A shift in *Nature*, though, runs deeper than that. It's a fundamental change in character that, like a rededication of focus, involves drastic alterations of behavior and belief. As with a paradigm shift, a change of Nature shakes the core of who a person believes herself to be. Her relationships and self-image, the way she dresses and acts, the company she keeps, and the person she sees in the mirror... they all shift in unpredictable ways. Imagine Jinx forsaking her street-punk ways to become a Chorister nun or Akashic sage – weird, right? And yet such shifts are no less likely than the transformations we make in real life every day. Sure, mages are pretty set in their ways – they *have* to be, to do the things they do. Still, even willworkers can have monumental changes of heart... which provide you, as a roleplayer, with lots of great material.

Resolution

In time, your mage's Path will lead that character to some greater resolution – to stagnation, a Fall, or ultimate transcendence. Either way, you'll probably become a potent force for change in your chronicle. It's not *power*, though, that really provides the greatest rewards for a long-running **Mage** chronicle. Although the motivations that inspire folks to play **Mage** are as varied as the players themselves, the best reward for a veteran player may be the many opportunities you'll have to face implacable odds, dare impossible things, and change the world in ways that seem like magic... and to come out on the other side of those experiences with great stories to share and a sense of power you'd never expect from a simple "game."

VISITA
INVENIES

Chapter Seven: Telling The Story

The horizon melts into a limitless question mark, and like the cartographers of old,
we glimpse yawning monstrosities and mind-forged utopias beyond the edges of our paltry and provisional maps.
— Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic + Mysticism in the Age of Information*

"Are you sure about this?"

"Of course I'm sure! Aren't I always sure?"

Dr. Hans von Roth was tripping balls again. Scary thing was, he was behind the wheel this time, flying down I-5 at a speed that would make the Highway Patrol check its instruments before issuing a warrant for Hans' immediate execution.

Why I do I let myself get talked into these sorts of things?

The caretaking of eccentric geniuses is sort of my specialty. I can talk just enough shop that they consider me a kindred spirit without also considering me a threat. I've got to admit, Hans is one of my favorites – a car-loving Etherite with a warehouse full of toys and a high-grade cloaking device that lets him take them for a spin without doing time every time he hits a gas pedal. Still, Hans has a thing for hallucinogens, too. Claims they "open him to the profound answers to the profound questions that guide the most profound layers of quanto-physical applications" or something along those lines. Anyway, that seems to work for him.

But opening up the throttle on an experimental mod while peaking on high-grade Electroplex? With ME in the car? I should have just taken the night off.

The collision-aversion sensors blinked a steady red as Hans drifted through the traffic like those other cars were standing still. Given his work with chronological adjustment technology, they just might have been. I grafted on my cutest smile and tried not to white-knuckle my way through the demonstration.

"My calculations indicate," he said, his eyeballs like something out of a cartoon, "that the chance of Paradoxical anomalies with this particular configuration under the present circumstances is less than 32.5476 percent."

"Oh," I breathed while alarms went off screaming in my head. "You mean we have less than a 33% chance of triggering a Paradox like this."

"Substantially less," he giggled. "Sort of."

On nights like that, I tell you, I sort of wish I'd stayed asleep.

Except I really DON'T.

To be honest, even on the crazy nights, I pity people who don't have this sort of thing in their lives.

At Play in the Fields of the World

Let's *play*.

Let's remake the world in our own image.

That's what **Mage** is all about. At the heart of all these cosmic conspiracies and metaphysical paradigms, **Mage** invites you to play with possibilities and turn reality inside out simply because you *can*. For all of its Many Big Important Ideas™, **Mage** is a game, and we want you to enjoy it. Because without that sense of playful creativity, the many words collected in this weighty tome are all just ink on paper or pixels on a screen, signifying nothing.

The Game's the Thing

If you've gotten this far in this monumental tome, you're probably familiar with storytelling games – a.k.a. *roleplaying games*, or *RPGs*. Those terms, though, can mean different things to different people. For clarity's sake, then, let's sketch out some basics before getting more ambitious.

The Big "S"

What do we mean when we say *Storyteller?* Put simply, she's the player who sets everything else in motion. The Storyteller lays out the setting, shoves the characters together, kicks off the action, and then keeps things moving from start to finish. The Master of Ceremonies for your group's chronicle, a Storyteller provides the framework and momentum for adventure. Although each participant collaborates with the other players, the basis for that chronicle originates with the Storyteller.

The Chronicle

A chronicle takes a collection of characters and sends them into harm's way. And for the Storyteller, that chronicle becomes a sort of character – an extension of herself. A great chronicle takes on a life of its own, with passion, drive, vitality, and a memorable sense of personality.

How can you invest such qualities in your chronicle? By *caring* about the story and the things you can say in it. Because when you take issues that really matter to you – war, abuse, corruption, love – and then put them into the thing you're creating, you invest that creation with a vibrant sense of life.

Troupe Collaboration

You're not alone, either, in that sense of creativity. Collaboration is essential to the **Mage** experience. Everyone involved brings a bit of themselves to the table too. And by doing so, your gaming *troupe* – a group of folks working together – crafts a larger whole from unique parts. Each roleplaying group creates its own experience, and no two chronicles are ever alike.

Contrary to the old-school stereotypes about "Game Masters" who run their players through a gauntlet of terrors, each member of a **Mage** gaming troupe becomes a story-teller in his or her own right. The capital-S Storyteller makes the big decisions regarding rules and settings, but every player has a part in the creative process. Such *collaborative storytelling* reinforces the chronicle's sense of magic. In place of competition, you achieve unity. And that unity helps you sort through the more challenging aspects of **Mage**.

Improvisational Storytelling

Mage, more than many other games, is improvisational. You take what you have and then run with it – usually in unexpected directions. The various players take on their roles and then pursue agendas based in the concepts of each character. Magick is freeform, based more upon what a character *knows* and *needs* than upon a determined list of spells. Although certain frameworks (which we'll explore below) can help you guide the potential chaos, **Mage** is not a game for rigid preconceptions. With help from notes and systems, you make it up as you go along.

Improvisation and the Power of Yes

There's a tradition in live theatre called *improv*: using a loosely established foundation, the actors improvise their characters, relationships, and lines. A storytelling game is essentially a cross between improv and chess – improvised stories with a framework of rules. Many theatre troupes use improv as a game in its own right or as a tool that helps them understand a script. Certain troupes perform entirely through improvisation, relying upon trust and creativity to make the magic happen.

As an improvisational theatre game, **Mage** works best when you treat each situation as an invitation to move the story forward. A certain amount of structure is important, obviously; again, we'll go into that below. Within that structure, though, look at every challenge as an opportunity to ask *What if?* and then to run with the answers as they appear.

A common rule in theatre games involves "the power of *Yes*." Instead of shutting things down with a *No*, which limits possibilities, meet almost every challenge with a *Yes*. That Yes can be conditional, of course: *Yes, you can TRY to pull the moon from orbit... but don't expect to succeed without consequences you probably don't want to deal with.* And sometimes you really *DO* have to say *No* in order to keep the game from getting out of hand. (*No, you CAN'T be a vampire-changeling Garou mage...*) For the most part, though, let the power of *Yes* open the doors to further possibilities, so long as those possibilities fit in with your chronicle as a whole.

Let's say, for example, that you'd planned to run a mad-scientist chronicle with a bunch of Etherites throwing their inventions against the Technocracy. That might be where your game begins, but it probably won't stay that way for long. One player might decide that the Union's not that bad; another could pursue a Pagan Path instead, and a third might spark an uneasy friendship with a Black Suit who's just discovered that something's

Gaming as Ritual

Gaming *is* ritual – not in the sense of occult indoctrination, but in the sense of creating a sacred space for your imagination. In gaming, as in ritual, the participants focus their attention upon a task that includes certain consistent elements and achieves a certain goal. For the gaming group, that ritual takes everyone away from their mundane concerns and opens the doors to imagination and art. The Storyteller sets the stage for that ritual, directs the group's intentions, and – ideally – brings everyone to a sense of heroic accomplishment before transitioning back to the everyday world and sending folks into their usual lives again.

And so, as that Storyteller, be aware of your role as the "high priest/ess" of your troupe. Although you're not summoning demons or any of that nonsense, your group trusts you to take them on an interactive journey of imagination. The more you focus your creative intentions, and leave space for their creativity as well, the more effective and entertaining your games will be.

Watch Your Audience

Storytelling games, like live theatre, involve the interplay between performers and their audience. In a storytelling game, however, the performers and the audience are one. Everyone's playing off everybody else. As the Storyteller, though, you occupy the key role. It's vital, then, to watch your players and gauge your performance by their reactions.

As you describe events, observe the expressions, activities, and body language within your troupe. Do folks seem bored? Pick up the pace. Is someone distracted? Move the spotlight to her character, asking "*And meanwhile, what are YOU doing?*" Don't drone endlessly or focus on any one person for too long, but move instead from player to player, keeping everyone engaged. And if somebody looks upset, take a time-out to check in to see what's bothering him. It might not be related to the game... but then again, it *might* be, too.

Reading an audience is an acquired skill. The more you do it, the better you get. Even so, certain cues – frowning, talking off-topic, surfing the web in the middle of a game – are pretty easy to catch. If you treat your Storyteller role as a part in a play and make a point of interacting with your audience, you'll be more engaging in that role. Your players will be more invested in the game, you personally will have more fun, and the chronicle will be more entertaining than it might be otherwise.

rotten in the New World Order. All these characters possess the power to change reality more or less at a will, so, within a few sessions, that original concept has morphed into something rich and strange and not at all what you had planned.

What do you do, then?

Go with it.

What if the first player's mage gets courted by a NWO recruiter? *What if* the second one leaves the Society of Ether and becomes a Verbena technopagan? *What if* that third character's friend is the NWO recruiter who's trying to snag the first player's character because the Black Suit has recognized the corruption within his Union? By being flexible and regarding those player whims as invitations to shift the chronicle's direction, you can transform that mad-scientist chronicle into an insidious game of cat-and-mouse wherein tech-savvy mystics ally with Project Invictus in a dangerous plot to purge the Technocratic infiltration and perhaps bring out the best elements of that Union. It's not what you had in mind initially, but it's got serious potential.

An important note: "*Sorry, but that doesn't work*" is not a *No*. It's a "*Nice try, better luck next time*," not a complete denial of possibilities. "That doesn't work" is a totally appropriate answer within **Mage**, especially because the power of the Spheres relies so much upon expansive knowledge and heightened Will. Something might not work *now*, but that doesn't mean it'll *never* work if the mage just keeps trying... against greater odds of failure, of course.

Even so, there *are* times when *No* is a totally appropriate answer. No, you cannot perform a Rank 5 Effect when you have an Arete of 2. Some things really *are* off-limits, if only to keep the Storyteller from going stark raving mad. So if the Storyteller says *No*, then the answer is *NO*.

A Consistent Foundation Concept

All that being said, keep that creativity based upon a consistent foundation. Don't let your chronicle spiral off into chaos. It's easy, given **Mage**'s freeform magick and its wide variety of options, to get lost. And so, when you run your chronicle, focus your *What ifs* around a central concept. That way, you'll encourage possibilities without going too far afield.

We'll cover the idea of a *concept* shortly. For now, just remember that your concept – combined with ***Tone*** and ***Theme***, two other elements we'll address shortly – will provide the necessary gravity for your adventures. By keeping them in mind, you can all be creative without making an imaginative mess of your chronicle.

Fairness and Maturity

Given the game's flexible nature, a **Mage** chronicle demands a sense of fairness from each member of the troupe. Seriously, you have to trust one another. If someone in your group – the Storyteller included – tries to use **Mage**'s freeform nature as a license to screw over everybody else, the game's just not going to work. That's where maturity comes into play.

The word "mature" gets tossed around a lot, usually to justify lots of sex and violence. And yeah – **Mage** adventures *can* include lots of sex, drugs, carnage, and words Mama told you not to say unless you can use them properly in a sentence. That's not the sort of maturity we're talking about here, though. The core requirement for **Mage**, beyond imagination and the will to use it, is the maturity to not be a dick when folks play the game. That shouldn't need saying, but sometimes it still does.

So yes – Rule One: Don't be a dick. And Rule Two: Don't game with dicks.

Those two rules will save you lots of hassle in the long run.

Rules of the Game

Magick has rules. So does **Mage**. Think of those rules as laws of physics that keep things from flying off into space. And though the idea of rules governing a game about endless possibilities might seem a bit... um, *paradoxical*... those same rules help you define what those possibilities look like. A reliable structure gives you and your players a framework of consistency; without that, your chronicle has no reliable form – endless whimsy, but nothing you can count on.

As the Storyteller, you get to define just how *much* those rules affect your chronicle. Maybe you prefer a loose improvisational style in which dice play a minor part in the overall experience. Or perhaps you need a firm set of rules so that your players don't rip your chronicle apart. Most often, you'll probably choose a middle path between those extremes, balancing the needs of your story with the stability that rules provide. Fortunately, the Storyteller System that gets detailed in the following chapters allows you a lot of flexibility. Detailed rules have been provided for those times when you need them – most especially in **Chapters Nine and Ten**; even so, the ***Golden Rule*** detailed in **Chapter Eight** (p. 384) allows you to modify or junk the rules when it serves the story to do so. The extent to which those rules constrain your imagination is ultimately up to you.

All the same, **Mage** has elaborate rules for good reasons. The raw power of the Spheres is enough to turn your chronicle upside down. Given **Mage**'s improvisational magick system (detailed in **Chapter Ten**), you'll need the reliable structure of those rules in order to define what your players can and cannot do and how they can go about achieving what they want to achieve. Improvisational theatre games feature certain guidelines and constraints, and a **Mage** chronicle must do the same. Otherwise, you get chaos... and not the *fun* kind of chaos, either, especially not when you're the Storyteller!

The Storyteller, though, isn't the only person who depends upon the rules. Your players need them too, if only to help them figure out what their characters can accomplish. Consistent rules protect your players from capricious "story tyrants" and even protect the players from one another. Like the limits and boundaries discussed nearby, a set of clear, consistent rules allows everyone to relax and have more fun.

In your role as Storyteller, be fair and consistent in your application of the rules. You don't need to use every system in the next three chapters, but it's wise to at least be familiar with your options. That way, if you *need* them, those systems will be there. Like the laws of physics (or of magick), game rules help define the shape and potential of your world.

Ups and Downs

Like mages, players often have very strong ideas about the "right" way of doing things. Such differences can usually be worked out without much trouble, especially when you bring a spirit of compromise to the group as a whole. Assuming that everyone chooses to be reasonable, it's often easy to work through conflicts with a few brief words and a win/win attitude.

Also like their mages, **Mage** players are only human. Certain conflicts – nasty breakups, political rivalries, vastly different styles of play, and so forth – can be difficult to work out. In such situations, it's a good idea to set the game aside while the players (Storyteller included) try to find a comfort zone for everyone involved. If that's not possible, the person or people who can't sort things through might have to step aside for the good of the troupe as a whole... hopefully without hard feelings toward everybody else.

Problems, Boundaries, and the Three-Strike Zone

Every so often, someone either can't or won't cooperate. Maybe it's a personality clash or a difference of preferred playing styles. At worst, that person might step over the line and offend or even harm another member of the group. If such things happen, that person probably needs to go.

Minor mistakes are easy to understand, especially if the offending party is new to the group and doesn't quite understand the way everybody rolls. And, one would hope, little quirks are excusable between friends. Certain things, however, ought to be no-fly zones within your troupe: ethnic, gender, or religious slurs, unwanted sexual advances, outright harassment of any kind – generally anything that leaves a member of the troupe feeling unsafe, unwanted, or uncomfortable. It'd be nice to think that we're all above that sort of thing... but sadly, we've all seen otherwise. Some mutual trash-talk is fine *as long as everyone's cool about what's being said*. If someone's getting seriously angry or freaked out by a gaming mate's behavior, though, then that shit's not cool. And yes – it's the Storyteller's responsibility to make sure it stops.

(It'd also be nice to think that a *Storyteller* is above such behavior... and folks have witnessed otherwise. Let's put things this way: if your idea of a good time involves abusing your friends without their consent, then you have no business running games at all.)

The ***Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries*** sidebar offers up some guidelines about potential trouble spots and the methods you can use to avoid them. If someone within the group continues to go over the lines, however, invoke a *three-strikes policy*: first strike = warning; second strike = last warning;

third strike = yer outta here. A major violation – threatening or hitting another player, for example – is an instant strikeout. Mages might go for one another's throats, but **Mage** *players* should be better than that. When one member of the troupe hurts, the entire group suffers as well.

Obviously, these rules apply to the Storyteller as well. That should go without saying, but there have been stories of at least one "game master" who slapped her players and of several Storytellers who deal out serious emotional abuse in the name of fun. This should not fly. *EVER.*

The F-Word

The key to a great gaming experience can be summed up in one word: *FUN.* Everyone involved should be having a good time. Although your *characters* may be up to their necks in Paradox, the *players* ought to be having the time of their lives. That's yet another reason to avoid the old "DM vs. Players" tradition: although that sort of game *can* be fun for certain groups, it all too often leads to hurt feelings and shouting matches... and really, don't y'all have better ways to spend your time?

It's worth noting that the Storyteller is a player too. She should be having a good time as well... and if she's *not*, then something has gone wrong. Back in the early **Mage** days, anguished Storytellers would often call the White Wolf offices asking for advice. Once the rules questions got cleared up (an important step in those early days!), the best piece of advice we could offer – then and now – was this: *don't game with assholes.* If you, as the Storyteller, don't enjoy running a game, then there's no point in playing it at all.

Ideally, none of these reminders will be necessary. Most gaming troupes manage to enjoy themselves for years without driving one another up the nearest tree. For folks with imagination and nerve, the Storyteller's role tends to be a great deal of fun: though other people get to share in your chronicle's creative process, the heart of that creativity belongs to you.

Setting the Space

Before kicking off that great adventure, you might want to *set your space* – that is, prepare a dedicated gaming area where you and your troupe can get the most of out that experience.

Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries

It's one thing to traumatize your *characters* and quite another thing to send your *players* into therapy. Especially in the Storyteller's role, it's vital to know the limits and boundaries within your troupe.

Those boundaries will depend upon the people in your group, the things they've experienced, and the things that they consider fun to play with. One group might have a grand time busting up child porn conspiracies, whereas another prefers leaving real-life horrors outside the gaming room door. Chances are good that you already know your friends well enough to understand the sorts of things they do and do not enjoy. Certain topics, though, present potential land mines – especially in a setting based on *interactive* entertainment, where characters often become extensions of their creators. Rape, racism, sexual or gender-based assault, domestic violence, harm to children or animals... these subjects, and others like them, can trigger emotional trauma simply by appearing in a tale.

It's tempting to say, "*Chill out – this is only a game.*" Emotions, though, aren't nearly that simple. Interactive entertainment encourages people to identify with their characters; such connections, in turn, inspire strong emotions. Especially for folks who've suffered real-life violations, the idea of experiencing such things in the context of entertainment can kick their legs right out from under them. I've seen it happen. Don't go there.

When considering hot-button topics within your game, check in first with your players and see if those subjects disturb them. That's not political correctness – it's *respect.* Find out terms or topics to avoid, and then step carefully around potential land mines. Even then, a wise Storyteller keeps an eye on her group. If folks seem uncomfortable, it's probably time to back off on the throttle. *Never,* incidentally, tell a player that he or she has no right to feel bothered by your game's events. It's not your place to invalidate their experiences.

Safewords, Cards, and Blackouts

Taking a page from the BDSM playbook, you might want to work out *safewords* within your group: unusual phrases that let you know when a boundary's getting pushed. "Green card," for instance, can show that everything's cool; "yellow card" indicates that you're getting close to a limit, and "red card" tells you to back off *now.* You might even make up colored cards so that people can just wave a card if they're feeling triggered. Under certain circumstances, that might feel safer than speaking up.

Meanwhile, a *blackout rule* allows a player to call an immediate halt to a scene that he feels is pushing the line too far. Any player can call "*Blackout!*" and conclude the scene right there. Obviously, these options demand player responsibility as well. It's up to players to speak up if they feel triggered... and it's also up to them to use that power reasonably. Calling *Blackout* just to screw with the plot is kind of a dick move.

Ultimately, mature gaming demands *consent.* If everyone agrees to go over the edge, then go there with style. If your edge, though, is someone else's hot zone, respect those limits and move on. The words "I'm sorry" can cover a multitude of sins if you really mean them. Not having something to apologize *for,* however, really *is* the best way to roll.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be rich or have a big house in order to set up a good gaming space. Storytellers can host gaming groups in their living room, in the corners of packed convention centers, and even – in one memorable GenCon game – run games outside in a park. A good gaming area involves more *head*space than *physical* space. Although it's nice to have enough space to comfortably accommodate a group of people in relative privacy, the real key to setting space involves establishing and retaining a suitable mood.

Preparation

To start with, be prepared to run your game. If you're scattered and disorganized, your players can tell. To avoid that situation, hash out some notes before things begin (see below) and then keep them close at hand. Take a little bit of time to set things up, get yourself into the right frame of mind, and prepare a quick transition to move the group out of the everyday world and into the world of your chronicle. Having such things prepared ahead of time will save you time and trouble in the long run. It's much easier to be focused when you've got your shit together.

Notes

A collection of brief yet helpful notes helps you brainstorm and organize your chronicle. Some Storytellers keep extensive notes, outlining the goals and histories of each supporting character, while others sketch the important stuff onto index cards and then paper-clip them together for easy reference. At the very least, you ought to have a few sheets of paper or cardstock that feature the following information:

- Character names and at least one significant feature of each noteworthy character. **(See *Characters*, pp. 355-357).**
- At least one agenda for each listed character.
- Similar entries for important settings and their features. **(See *Settings*, pp. 357-359).**
- A brief summation of *Who's-Doing-What-to-Whom*.
- A *combat cheat sheet* that shows you – at a glance – the basic capabilities of the important antagonists: Arete; Spheres; initiative dice pool; dice pools for Dexterity + Brawl, Melee and Firearms; soak roll dice pool; and other vital combat rolls and Traits. **(See *Combat* in Chapter Nine, pp. 409-458).**
- Updated notes, prepared between the previous gaming session and the one that's about to begin. Those updates include the ways in which the last session changed the characters, their agendas, the settings, and so on.

No matter how elaborate your Storyteller notes might be, keep quick-reference notes close at hand. Bulky notebooks

get in the way when the action begins, so you'll want to have something you can refer to at a glance.

You can clip the index cards together by rough categories (group of vampires, group of Technocrats, etc.), and then use large binder clips to collect the notes of each gaming session into something that fits in my hand.

Depending on your resources, you might want to keep your notes in a computer, smart phone, or other data storage device. Even then, though, you might get the best use out of old-school paper notes for the sessions themselves. In the heat of combat, it's easier to pick up an index card than it is to search through a bunch of folders on your laptop screen.

Again, don't forget to update your notes between sessions. Given the improvisational nature of **Mage**, those cheat sheets and index cards can provide a script of sorts, even as you make stuff up off the top of your head.

Headspace

Running games takes focus, imagination, and clarity. That's not always easy to find, especially if (like me) you wind up gaming after a long days at work or class. What then?

Give yourself a few minutes to clear some headspace. Breathe. Ground and center before folks show up to or before you arrive at the gaming space. If you have the opportunity, play some music and let yourself brainstorm about all the things you want to have happen that evening. Go over your notes briefly beforehand to refresh your vision and secure your confidence. If you're familiar with meditation, a bit of meditation is always a good idea. Overall, give yourself some breathing room between the stresses of your everyday life and the creative realm of running your chronicle. You'll be happier, and you'll do a better job of Storytelling, if you've reached a creative headspace by the time your friends appear.

If you *don't* have your shit together on a given night, then don't push things you're not ready to push. **Mage** really *is* just a game, and life sometimes takes precedence over gaming. It's better to call things off and play something else than it is to force out several hours of group creativity. Most experienced Storytellers recommend having a backup plan – possibly a "beer-n-pretzels" type of board game – in case your inner Storyteller is feeling reclusive on Game Night. If your group has several different people running different games, then see if one of your friends can run her game instead. Like other types of preparation, it's good idea to have a few fallback positions ready in case you need them. This way, you really can "bring your A game" to the **Mage** table and fall back when the magick isn't in you.

Physical Space

The *ideal* gaming space features a comfortable, climate-controlled environment with plenty of seating room, a table and sound system, ready access to food and drinks, privacy, and the ability to dim the lights when necessary. Most of us have to make do with a lot less than that. Although it's a good idea to have privacy, seating room, and possibly a table and sound system, you can stage a gaming session anywhere that you and your friends can set up shop.

At the bare minimum, your physical space should allow your troupe to feel more or less at home. A distracting, uncomfortable area can block your group's creativity. So – assuming you've got the chance to set things up ahead of time – arrange your space to enhance the mood of the story you want to tell. Although certain physical things on your part – confidence, assertive body language, a voice that's clear enough to be heard and flexible enough to be expressive – can help you set the space with your body alone, a comfortably private location makes your job a lot easier.

Food, Drinks, and Other Goodies

A certain amount of food and drinks are fairly traditional in gaming circles. Especially if you're gathering after work or school, refreshment's an essential part of the experience. Even so, it's a good idea to get the feast out of the way before your game begins. The rarified reaches of the Astral Realms may be hard to evoke when the scent of pizza's in the air.

Many gaming groups favor a potluck approach, with the members all bringing something to the table. Others pool their money and pitch in for a meal prepared by someone else. Whatever you do, please buy smart, eat healthy, and give your hard-earned cash to ethically-run local businesses whenever possible.

If you can do so, prepare food that sets the tone for coming adventure: venison for a wilderness tale, Indian food for a trip to Goa, an old-school banquet before entering the Hermetic Chantry, that sort of thing. Such preparations generally work best for groups with plenty of resources, but they can do wonderful things for your game if handled well. Beers, mead, or other alcoholic drinks work best in moderation; drunken gamers can be really obnoxious, and no one wants to die on the way home from the game. However appropriate the meal, though, it's best to get the eating out of the way before your game begins. That way, the attention's on *you*, not on the last piece of pizza congealing in its own grease.

Transition

Whenever you begin, take a moment to transition between that bunch of buddies hanging out and that group of willworkers facing life and death. Musical cues work well for this sort of thing; so does dimming the lights for a moment, lighting candles, or reading or reciting a piece of fiction or poetry that sets the mood. (Don't laugh – this technique works wonders.) A group recap helps to set the stage as well, either as a prelude leading up to your transition, or as part of the transition itself. Whatever you do, underscore the division between social time and the chronicle. That helps you move your entire group into the appropriate headspace, focusing everyone's attention on the story at hand.

Music

I'm a huge advocate for music during gaming sessions: music helps set up atmosphere and invokes a sense of *Other* once the chronicle begins. That said, you'll want to use the *right* music to set the scene. A menacing encounter in a Nephandic Labyrinth will – unless you're Quentin Tarantino – seem ludicrous when set against a playlist of '70s disco hits.

Back in the Stone Age, Dungeon Masters used to keep a stack of vinyl LPs next to the stereo – both of which were of course within easy reach of the Dungeon Mastering chair. Later, groups and Storytellers made mix tapes for different moods or games. A well-used CD player and big stacks of CDs were essential components of the '90s White Wolf era. These days, you can set up MP3 playlists with various atmospheres, and then transition between them as necessary. (It's a good idea to switch that music when moving from social time into game time.) In general, a good soundscape adds immeasurably to gaming sessions. Your mileage may vary, but music can be a potent Storyteller tool.

When you're setting a mood, it's often best to avoid overly familiar songs unless you're going for a specific effect, like playing Johnny Cash to reflect an old-school biker bar. Fortunately, it's easy to find cool music these days; eMusic, iTunes, BandCamp, YouTube, Amazon.com, and other venues are perfect for scouting and procuring music to suit your needs, and theme-based collections of classical music (*Classical Heartbreak*, *Classical Thunder*, etc.) contain tons of worthy material.

In general, avoid music with prominent lyrics unless you're going for a specific type of mood that such lyrics emphasize. Orchestral or otherwise instrumental movie soundtracks work great for setting atmosphere, so long as you don't fall into Indiana Jones Theme Syndrome. Ethnic or historical music playlists are wonderful if you're trying to establish a sense of place. Meanwhile, certain obscure soundscape genres – ambient techno, industrial noise, witch-house, and so on – weave ideal sonic tapestries for the **Mage** atmosphere. See the ***Music for Mages*** sidebar for suggested artists, and bring your own tastes to the table. Keep the music soft enough to set a mood without overpowering your players, and – when possible – give yourself several options so you can easily switch music (or turn it off entirely) as your situation demands.

Game Boards and Miniatures

RPGs originated as wargames, in which the players invested their miniatures with personalities and played out battles with storylines. These days, you don't need miniatures in order to roleplay; such accoutrements may even seem distractingly old school. Still, gaming miniatures – plus their near-ubiquitous hex maps or white boards – provide a sense of talismanic focus. If nothing else, they help keep track of the distance between your Verbena and the HIT Mark chasing him.

Music for Mages

Soundtracks: Clint Mansell (*The Fountain, Moon, Requiem for a Dream*), Philip Glass (*Koyaanisqatsi, Dracula, Mishima*), Peter Gabriel (*The Last Temptation of Christ, Birdy*), Lisa Gerrard (*A Thousand Roads, Samsara, The Whale Rider*), Ennio Morricone (*The Mission, Baaría*), Jamin Winans (*Ink, The Frame*), Tan Dun (*Hero, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,*), Tyler Bates (*300*), Vangelis (*Mythodea, El Greco*).

Mystic Techno: Moby, Rob Dugan, Karsh Kale, Tricky, Rasa, Angel Tears, Massive Attack, Portishead, Hybrid, TransGlobal Underground, MIDIval PunditZ, Suns of Arqa.

Dark Sacred World Fusion: Arcana, Dead Can Dance, Vas, Lisa Gerrard, Irfan, Rajna, Azam Ali, Knossos, Djivan Gasparyan, Soriah, Master Musicians of Bukkake.

Neotribal World Fusion: Delhi 2 Dublin, Kan'Nal, Dhol Foundation, One Giant Leap, Omnia, Faun, SJ Tucker, Niyaz.

Neotribal Ambient: Diatonis, Deva Premal, Steve Roach (and his many collaborators), R. Carlos Nakai (likewise), Robert Rich (again, likewise), Alio Die (ditto that).

Post-Rock: godspeed you! black emperor, Explosions in the Sky, Earth, Sigur Ròs.

Industrial Noise: Throbbing Gristle, Crash Worship, NON, Skinny Puppy, Terrorfakt.

Black Ambient: Endura, Atrium Carcerai, Lustmord, Lapis Niger, Archon Satani, Profane Grace, The Sight Below.

Dark Atmosphere: Caul, Gustaf Hildebrand, Sephiroth, Delerium (pre-*Semantic Spaces*), Shahrokh Yadegari, Svarte Greiner, Phelios, Stoa, Halgrath, Terra Ambient, Nick Parkin, Raison D'Etre.

Ethereal Gothic: Death in June, Black Tape for a Blue Girl, Qntal, Dark Sanctuary, Love Spirals (Downwards).

Witch-House: White Ring, Raw Moans, Sycorax, oOoOO.

Cinematic: Globus, Two Steps From Hell, E.S. Posthumous, Gothic Thunder, The Immediate.

Power Techno: Juno Reactor, KMFDM, Project Pitchfork, VNV Nation.

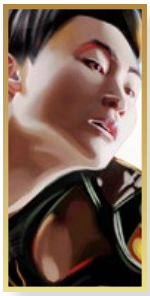
Trippy Rave Techno: Infected Mushroom, Hallucinogen, Ovnimoon, Shpongle, Hilight Tribe, and, of course, Cosmosis, E-Mantra, and Entheogenic.

Traditionally, gaming miniatures range between 25 mm and 30 mm in the essentially human scale. At that scale, a one-inch hex reflects *roughly* six feet, or two yards, or two meters. That's not truly accurate, but it'll do. When judging distance, then, figure that two hexes are approximately 10 feet, or three yards or meters. Vital thing to remember: *10 yards does not equal 10 hexes!* I've made that mistake myself, and it really screws with the sense of scale within a game.

Given the variety of **Mage** characters and situations, all types of miniatures could suit your game. A mix of modern, SF, and high fantasy figures is probably best. Thanks to the Internet, you can now secure PDF kits that allow you to print up customizable maps and buildings on cardstock. Such things can seriously crowd your gaming space, of course. Unless you've got shelves within close reach, miniatures can become a pain in the ass to employ. As the Storyteller, you should set aside groups of figures to represent particular characters, antagonists, and groups. Don't let your players see them, if you can help it. The dramatic value of pulling out an especially unsettling miniature and setting it on the table makes all the potential hassles worthwhile.

With the right group, you can tell any story, anywhere, under almost any conditions. That's one of the strengths of "tabletop" RPGs, as opposed to computer games. Even so, the physical and mental space you employ can make a huge difference in your gaming experience. So, whenever possible, use those environments to your advantage when setting up your chronicle and putting it into play.

Building a Mystery



Mage is big. *Huge*, even. Packed with concepts and conspiracies. Faced with that abundance of material, where do you even *start?*

Like any story-teller in the grand tradition of tale-spinning, you begin with a *concept* based upon your ideas. Sparked by your personal experiences (hiking? retail? relationships? lab work?) and your favorite influences (books? movies? scriptures? music?), with input from your troupe and the material within this book, those ideas will guide the creative architecture that supports your chronicle. From that point, you use *story structure* to give substance to your initial ideas. By taking on the Storyteller's role, you're deciding to build a mystery – an interactive series of stories for which no one knows the ending... not even *you*.

That is one of the most engaging aspects of interactive storytelling: that sense of mystery, the freefall feeling of meeting up each week with friends to see where our characters will go. Unlike the linear progression of most board or computer games, a storytelling game follows its own creative direction. No two groups, and no two games, play things out the same way. As the Storyteller, it's your job to provide a framework for that imaginative flow. And yet, when all is said and done, the stories you create together contain an unpredictable chemistry – a sense of magick that few other pastimes can provide.

Brainstorming Your Concept

The foundation for that magick comes from its initial concept. You want to run a mad-scientist chronicle? A saga about high-rolling mystic grifters? An intense survival tale in tumultuous Otherworlds? Find the concept that most appeals to you. Sit back and let your imagination fly. Picture images that inspire you: rock concerts, bloody rites, stormy romances, flying SUVs – whatever kicks your pulse into high gear. From there, ask yourself, *What can I do to make these things happen in my chronicle?*

And then give yourself the answers and start writing down ideas...

Who? What? Why? Where? When? How?

Questions and answers provide a framework for your ideas:

- Who's doing what to whom?
- Why are they doing it, and what do they hope to gain?
- Where are these things happening, and why are they happening there?
- When is this all going down... and why isn't it happening at any other time?
- How does all of this affect your heroes? And how will the heroes affect the other characters and events?

Here's where **Mage**'s vast backstory comes in handy. The various factions of the Ascension War have agendas, motivations, tactics, and rivalries... all of which provide fuel for your creative machine. They tap into exciting archetypes, too: steampunk scientists, Pagan witches, martial artists and machine-men, old-school wizards, sleek futurians, and many more besides. Let all of those ideas bounce around inside your skull, and then draw your concept from the one that most excites you. Give it substance from your personal Q&A sessions... and in that process, look for common ground upon which to build the rest of your chronicle.

Common Ground

Some mages play really well with others. Most, however, do not, unless there's some powerful motivating force, a shared situation, mutual enemy, or other relationship that binds them. In order to cooperate for any length of time, your players need a mutual purpose. And in order to last beyond a single adventure, they'll require compelling ties that unite them beyond their various differences.

The Epic and the Intimate

Mage doesn't have to be all about HIT Marks and Horizon Realms. In fact, it usually works best when you focus on the human element. And yet, **Mage** is full of metaphysical conspiracies. What's a Storyteller to *do* with all those possibilities?

Simply choose the ones that appeal most to you.

Mage is full of options. You don't need to know them all, use them all, or bring all of them into the tale you choose to run. **Mage** can be as epic as *Game of Thrones* or as intimate as *Closetland*. The most vital thing for you, as the Storyteller, to recall is that *you* decide how large or small your chronicle will be.

Think of **Mage** as a spectrum between the epic scope of an Ascension War waged across the Tapestry, and the intimate journey of one person walking a treacherous Path alone. Along that spectrum, you could craft a chronicle around a single newly-Awakened mage – say, Jinx from **Chapter Six** – or open up the heavens and send a cabal of mages throughout the Otherworlds. Although it's generally best to start small and work up to the big stuff, you can choose the size and scope of the chronicle you run. If grand-scale adventure is what you crave, then go for it. This book gives you plenty of material to use!

Throughout **Mage 20**, we offer flashes of humanity: the grieving lover, the dedicated healer, the dancing Ecstatic at the heart of a crowd. Whatever adventures they face in the long run, such intimate moments define those characters and their approach to the Arts. At the same time, this book reveals the dizzying swirl of Otherworlds and histories that transcend any human life. From that interplay of passionate mortals and titanic events, you can choose a spot on the spectrum and then focus your chronicle there. Jinx's chronicle, for instance, might not leave the hidden corners of Seattle; she might never meet a Man in Black or step beyond the barriers. For all its epic scale, **Mage** isn't really about cosmic throwdowns with all Reality at stake – it's about flawed human beings whose eyes have opened so far that they'll never fall Asleep again.

Mage, first and foremost, is about *people*. Those people have hopes, fears, relationships, and lives. Even the grandest Archmage has human frailties that complement his godlike capabilities, and that contrast between sublime power and mortal weakness is essential to the spirit of **Mage**. As a Storyteller, then, keep that human element in mind. If nothing else, it provides a rich source of material for the stories you choose to create.

The contentious nature of the Ascension War and the smaller discords between different factions and sects can often make it hard to find common ground, especially between radically diverse characters. From a Storyteller perspective, therefore, you'll need to create a suitable connection between your players... one that – if you want your chronicle to continue for a while – ought to stand the tests of time and tempest.

Creating Common Ground

Whenever possible, brainstorm with your players before the chronicle begins. Decide upon a concept that fits their desired characters, and characters that fit your desired concept. Although a bit of tension between characters is a good thing, a group of characters who remain terminally incompatible will kill your chronicle deader than disco. The same holds true for characters who are incompatible with the chronicle's concept. If the Storyteller wants to run a Black Suit saga and the players start making up Etherites and Ecstatics, things will hit the skids like Santa sleigh-riding in July.

Fortunately, you have several options when sorting out chronicle compatibility:

- **The Group Concept:** After deciding upon the concept, tell your players to create characters that fit into an appropriate group (all mad scientists, Black Suits, gutter-orphans, etc.). Only characters who suit your concept will be approved, and you retain Storyteller veto power. Assuming that you don't enforce a concept that your players hate, this can be the simplest option. That said, it's pretty restrictive, and if one player wants to be a shaman while another plays a Templar, you've got problems.

- **The Shared Situation Concept:** Like the *group concept*, all the player characters must fit a certain requirement. In this case, though, the requirement is based around an external situation that unites the characters in spite of their differences. Examples could include people who all share the same mentor, mages all attending the same university lecture, kids going to the same high school, inmates at the same institution, and so forth. This way, the situation unites otherwise diverse mages – hopefully beyond that initial episode. Chantries, Horizon Realms, political upheavals, and related factions can all provide shared situations, and assuming that your mages have good reasons to forge lasting bonds amongst themselves, this may be the strongest option you have.

- **The Looming Threat Concept:** Something awful is coming down, and that threat unites mages who would otherwise have nothing to do with each other. This one can be a pretty stale trope, though, and it depends upon prior connections (like those shared by John Courage and Lee Ann in the **Prelude**), shared ideals or enemies (as in a revolution), or outrageous coincidences ("*Look!*

Up in the sky! It's a Nephandic warship!" Um, no...). Natural and man-made disasters can unite strangers or enemies, but that bond probably won't last for long.

Whatever you do, set up parameters around your concept before the players start making up characters. Decide upon hooks that will unite your players' characters, and then work them into the backstories for those characters, as described below under ***Hook in Mouth***. Maybe two of the characters went to school, or dated, or worked together. Perhaps everyone has common friends, allies, or enemies. Whatever hooks you decide to use, make sure that your heroes have reasons to cooperate beyond the first crisis.

Trying to retrofit a **Mage** chronicle around a diverse range of characters is *possible* but *difficult*. So just save yourself the headaches. Decide what you want to do beforehand, and then tell your players to work within that idea.

Hook in Mouth

Great stories need sharp *hooks*: characters or situations that grab people and drag them into the tale. When the phone rings at 3:00 a.m., or the car next to you explodes, or the crow flies in your window telling you to fuck off and die, the hook has been baited, cast, and taken.

Any good hook pulls the characters and audience out of their usual flow. By its nature, a hook penetrates the skin of everyday events and snags the meat of the people involved. It doesn't have to be explosive, but it must possess an irresistible force. Hooks are not polite suggestions but calls to action that no one can ignore.

As a Storyteller, make certain that your tale contains several sharp hooks – one or two to set the story into motion and others along the way to keep your players and their characters engaged. Don't wait for the players to motivate themselves. Instead, keep things moving with hooks that your players cannot resist. Vary your approach as well – the *So-and-So got kidnapped by the Nephandi AGAIN* hook quickly loses its edge. In between gaming sessions, brainstorm up new hooks that suit your chronicle, and then bait them with tidbits along the way so that your players can't help biting when the hook appears.

Binding Ties

Once you've established the sort of common ground you'll want within your concept, hash out a few specific ties that encourage your players and their characters to work together.

Some potential ties include:

Personal Affection

At the most intimate level, the characters may be bound by love and friendship. Perhaps they're family, or lovers, or members of a tight-knit band of musicians or warriors. Disputes may arise but the characters sort them out – not merely because they *must*, but because they *want to*. Such relationships can weather intense strain, although certain internal schisms (cheating, addiction, loss of faith, and so forth) are more likely to wreck them than external challenges might be.

Shared Association

In the most obvious connection, the characters belong to the same group: a Tradition cabal, an intimate Chantry, a Technocratic amalgam, or some other similar band. The individuals within that group might not actually *like* each other much, but their loyalty to the group in question overrides potential conflicts. Protocols and duties forge a sense of solidarity. The group has ranks, answers to superiors, and quite often follows orders that the individual members dislike but obey. From a Storyteller perspective, such groups have built-in story hooks; someone tells them "*Jump*," and they respond. From a player perspective, though, this sort of bond can feel restrictive – and it *is*. The option works best for Technocratic groups, military personnel, or law-enforcement officers because such groups *do* function within chains of duties and commands. Individualists, however, are rarely welcome in such groups.

Similar Allegiance

Loyal to the same society or culture, our heroes share that dedication even if they have little in common beyond that allegiance. In this case, that loyalty must be strong enough to withstand the other differences between characters – differences that could derail your chronicle unless those characters build new bonds once the tale begins. Six characters who belong, say, to the Council of Nine will have little in common beyond similar dedication to the ideals of mystic liberties and global transcendence over the Technocracy's objections. It's the Storyteller's job, then, to weave tighter ties between the various members of your players' group. Without a stronger bond, factionalism can challenge and possibly demolish the group's integrity... especially if those factions have different ideas about what allegiance actually means.

Shared Territory

You're all in a tavern when the walls explode. What do you do? The shared territory option places your group's characters in the same place at the same time and then gives them a common emergency to face. Perhaps the territory in question is a matter of chance: a festival, club, laboratory, or other location where something just happens to go wrong. That's a pretty traditional game-hook, but it's also rather lame – dependent upon outrageous coincidence and (im)perfect timing. A stronger option links that territory to a patch of turf that your heroes feel strongly about: a neutral ground in the Ascension War, a beleaguered city block, a school to which they all belong, and so forth. The Harry Potter series presents an excellent example of this sort of connection: the kids start off as students at a wizards' school before they forge deeper connections and rivalries among themselves.

Collaboration

A mutual project can inspire intense cooperation. In this case, the players might be members of a sports team, lab group, assembly line, theatrical troupe, or some other source of teamwork.

Although rivalries can spring up over differences of personality, opinion, or methodology ("*No, it works better if you DO IT THIS WAY...*"), the heroes care enough about what they're doing that they'll cooperate even if they don't much like each other.

Obviously, this option demands a goal of some importance. If it's going to unite a group of mages, it has to matter to them all. Odds are good that it's a dangerous project (cleaning up a high-crime neighborhood); a work of art, science, or business ("*We WILL create the perfect cloning process!*"); or some other venture with risks that equal its potential rewards. Quite often, this option combines several other possibilities – forced cooperation, shared territory, and so on – into a fertile source of common ground that might last beyond the collaboration itself.

Forced Cooperation/ Forced Antagonism

The *Dirty Dozen* option: a bunch of badasses get shoved together by a greater force that demands that they cooperate or die. Inverted, this becomes the *Hunger Games* scenario: folks get forced to fight one another by someone they hate enough to unite against. In both cases, the bond comes from external pressure. If and when the heroes defeat that larger antagonist, the group could fall apart and the chronicle might end.

Then again, people tend to connect with one another for their own reasons, especially under intense circumstances. So although you might have to encourage deeper levels of connection, your players will probably handle part of the bonding process for you. Either way, the group's cooperation hinges on the power of that other party. If they could easily oppose it, after all, they wouldn't be in this situation to begin with.

Mutual Friends

On the flipside, your characters might be united by a common friend, mentor, child, dependent, ally, or other intimate acquaintance for whom they feel great loyalty or love. Although they might not have much in common beyond that bond (or they might, in fact, hate each other's guts), these folks could risk everything for the person they adore. The friend in question could be a group as well: an allied gang, friendly competitor, "sister" band, and so forth. Whatever the ties might be, your heroes join forces in an effort to aid them even in the face of danger.

Shared Enemies

Maybe your players have united to kick somebody's ass. Or perhaps they're running from the same Big Bad. Cops, Nephandi, Technocratic hit squads, vengeful Tradition mages... anyone who poses a mutual threat can be grounds for a temporary (and maybe even *lasting*) alliance.

That threat doesn't have to be deadly in order to be binding. Maybe the heroes all loathe the same teacher, boss, or co-worker. A rival band or despised clique can generate fellowship simply by being the focus for other people's hatred. Obviously, that hatred must be fairly intense. Folks who merely *annoy* people

"When This Ends, You're Dead!"

Common ground doesn't have to inspire affection. In fact, allies often find themselves at one another's throats, especially if that alliance features enemies united under a temporary truce. Even among friends, such common ground can breed contempt. So long as your *players* aren't antagonizing one another, the characters can hate each other's guts. Such rivalries may, in fact, make your chronicle much more fun... and certainly far more *interesting*... than it would be if everybody got along.

don't provide much common ground. Assholes who make their rivals want to piss liquid glass, on the other hand, can inspire many hands to dig a grave for them together.

Unlikely Alliance

In this book's **Prelude**, an Ecstatic seer and a renegade Black Suit display a long-running alliance that contradicts their apparent opposition. Such unlikely allies share common enemies, friends, viewpoints, or other goals that jump the chasm between them. These bonds can tie powerful stories together, especially in the contested-realities realm of **Mage**. The social pressures against such alliances, of course, can be equally intense, adding new layers of drama and antagonism to the mix. Faced with such pressures, the heroes must commit themselves to the partnership... and decide what to do when and if it fails.

A Greater Good or Evil

In the grand spectrum of mutual enemies, there are the folks you just can't stand... and then there are enemies so vast that they threaten existence as you know it. The *greater good or evil* option unites your players to either bring about some epic act of goodness or defeat some menace to everything they hold dear. In both cases, every other consideration pales in comparison to that ultimate alliance. Implacable enemies may find themselves on the same side of a fight if the fight in question is meaningful enough.

As usual in **Mage**, "good" and "evil" remain relative. An act of "goodness" might mean the destruction of logging operations in the Pacific Northwest, whereas the "evil" in question could come from the resurging Nine Traditions if your characters are Disparates or Technocracy agents. More often, however, that grand unification comes by way of massive natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, chemical spills, etc.), human threats (Nazism, Fascism, or Imperial Japan), metaphysical incursions (aliens, angry gods, dimensional rifts), or Awakened factions with unspeakable victory conditions for their Ascension ideal. In **Mage 20**, the Technocracy, Traditions, or both might be infiltrated by Nephandic corruptors; against that threat, even Men in Black and Ecstatic outlaws could find themselves on the same team...

These options can be mixed and matched, of course, and a combination of ties creates a stronger sense of common ground. Whichever options you select, make sure to keep that ground moving under your heroes' feet. **Mage**, ideally, is unpredictable, and the mutual friends of one tale may become the greater evil of the next.

Bringing the Pieces Together

When you brainstorm up a **Mage** adventure, take the elements you want and then leave the rest alone for now. There'll be plenty of material to choose from if you want to use it later.

Players, Characters, and the Concept

Let's say, for example, that Kelly wants to run a **Mage** chronicle. Inspired by her teaching job, her love of the outdoors, and the time she spent hiking on the Appalachian Trail, she decides that she wants to run a chronicle based around a wilderness witch-school. She envisions high mountains, steep cliffs, the roll of smoke at an early morning campfire, and the dark reach of endless trees. Yoga poses at dawn. Strange sounds in the middle of the night. A full moon rising over valleys where the lights of civilization seem like ghosts of a very different world. There's Kelly's foundation. Cool.

From the brainstorming session with her group, Kelly knows that her players have some very different ideas. George wants to play a Syndicate enforcer, Sandi has a rich mad scientist in mind, Inky plans to make a club-based character, and Kevin has been dying to play a shamanic trickster. Kelly wants them to all run with their inspirations, but that character group is almost impossibly diverse and essentially antagonistic.

Clearly, it's time for creative overdrive. First off, Kelly decides to strike an *unlikely alliance* through a *shared situation concept*. She tells her players to make characters who'll meet up at the Catastrophe Collective Arts Festival and become friends as a result. That's a weird fit for George's hitman, but the player assures her that his enforcer is a street-level operative who's exploring transhumanist subcultures as a way to move up within the Syndicate. After casting a wary eye at that justification, Kelly decides to allow it... "*as long as you play up his personal investment in the friends your guy makes in the process.*" This way, George's character could find himself caught in a web of conflicting loyalties – a dramatic situation, to be sure!

Questions, Answers, and Motivations

So now, Kelly hits the stage of *Who? What? Why? Where? When?* and *How?*

Who's Doing What to Whom?

Kelly's brainstorming images suggest a group of mystic Pagans who've made a retreat deep in the Appalachian woods. Although there might be two or three mages among them, these folks are largely *aware* but not *Awake*. Kevin's shamanic trickster belongs to that community, though, so the player group has personal ties to the situation.

Obviously, someone's going to be threatening that refuge. So...

Why Are They Doing It, and What Do They Hope to Gain?

Kelly's obvious answer involves a company that claims fracking rights over a rich supply of natural gas that supposedly lies beneath the woods. That company has significant influence within the political and business communities, so the necessary permits have been granted, the necessary palms have been greased, and the necessary systems have been set into motion.

That, at least, is what's happening on the Sleeper side of things. Beneath the surface, so to speak, there's a lot more going on there. This could be a simple matter of mages versus mortals, but there's really not much of a challenge involved there. Kelly decides to have other mages pulling the strings behind that fracking project. Is it the Technocracy... or worse? And what, really, are they after?

Where Are These Things Happening, and Why Are They Happening There?

Kelly decides to have a powerful sacred space – a Node – in those woods. The community has dedicated itself to protecting that Node, and the rival mages have dedicated themselves to taking or destroying it. This means wiping out the refuge, killing the folks who live there, and turning that area into a hive of industry... probably a corrupt one, at that!

Because two of her players want to run Technocrats, Kelly decides to have the Union involved in the effort. In order to push her players over to the side of the mystics, however, she decides that the Technocracy is corrupted by the Fallen. Dropping hints about that Nephandic corruption into the backstories for Sandi's and George's characters, Kelly gives them reasons to turn against the Technocracy... or at least against the infiltration within the Technocracy. This, in turn, gives Sandi and George a reason to divide their loyalties between their friends and their Union – and to pursue the fight once this particular adventure ends.

When Is This Happening... and Why Isn't It Happening at Any Other Time?

Maybe the fight has been going on for a while. The wilderness mystics have dug themselves in, and legal skirmishes and covert violence have gone down before the player characters get involved. Kevin's trickster is already invested in the situation by the time he meets the other characters. Maybe he was even searching for allies, and although the folks he's met at Catastrophe are unlikely allies, they might want to help out. Kelly makes a note to *give* them reasons, because things have reached a crisis by the time the players get involved. Unless someone steps up to the plate and changes the game, the wilderness refuge is going down hard.

How Does This Situation Affect the Heroes? And How Will the Heroes Affect the Other Characters and Events?

In order to set up the adventure in the wilderness, Kelly runs brief preludes for each of the characters and then an opening "origin story" for the group. **(See *The Prelude*, Chapter Six, p. 262).** Planting clues about a Nephandic plot within the Technocracy, Kelly gives each player and character a reason to fight that conspiracy. The origin story brings everyone together to defeat a Fallen sect that's exploiting the Catastrophe Arts Festival. Kelly and Kevin use that alliance as a jumping-off point for the wilderness adventure, and soon the stage is set for some serious fish-out-of-water adventure, where the urban characters face a setting they're not used to dealing with and a group that might not appreciate their interest in the situation...

In short, then, Kelly has the foundation for a **Mage** chronicle: a collection of dynamic elements, potential conflicts, and a bit of something for everyone involved. And now that she's got that foundation, the Storyteller can begin to craft the stories that her chronicle demands.

Telling Your Story

A fine story is essentially a ritual. The storyteller – a ritual officiant – takes other people out of their everyday lives and into a short-lived yet extraordinary experience. Those people, in turn, invest their attention and imaginations into that experience. Without both doing their part, the ritual or tale falls flat.

In **Mage** and other storytelling games, mutual collaboration takes that ritual in unexpected directions. Even so, a good interactive game still shows the same characteristics as a more linear story. As the Storyteller, it's both your job and privilege to lead your players into the world you create together. How can you do that? Read on...

Story Structure

Rituals and stories take their participants on a journey. Ideally, the people they are at the end are not the people they were in the beginning. That sense of travel and transformation is vital. And without high stakes and drastic change, everyone's just going through the motions. A strong story, like a potent ritual, needs to feel like it *matters* to everyone involved.

To provide that sense of transformation, every good ritual or story has a structure that follows the pattern of a mythic journey:

- An opening hook leaves the everyday world behind;
- An introduction brings the participants into the realm of transformation;

- A sense of emotional investment adds meaning to the outcome of that journey;
- An escalating series of challenges must be met and overcome;
- A gradual build of energy intensifies that journey, culminating in...
- A climactic revelation, through which some end is achieved, often followed by...
- A final cool-down period where things get wrapped up and the participants rejoin the familiar realm again.

In a storytelling game, that structure helps you keep dramatic tension tight, elevating a series of die rolls to an imaginative odyssey in which your players change their world.

Elements of the Story

In stories, certain elements – *character*, *setting*, *conflict*, and *resolution* – come together to form a greater whole. Character provides a focus, setting establishes the *where and when*, conflict spurs those characters to action, and resolution wraps the whole thing up. A Storyteller juggles those elements with his imagination. From its various pieces, the story takes form.

Characters

"Once upon a time," there was a *character*: a clever witch, a boy wizard, a mad scientist or sacred shaman, a hacker, a trickster, a lover, whatever. Every story has at least one character; without that focus, the action has no meaning. Which characters, then, drive your chronicle? Who provides its focus, its tension, its backdrop and stakes? In Kelly's chronicle, the significant characters include the uneasy alliance of player heroes, the inhabitants of the woodland refuge, the various parties trying to bring it down, and probably a few supporting roles who'll add color and surprises to the plot.

As the Storyteller, you get to play all the supporting roles and probably some major ones as well. Your players take center stage, of course, but the rest of the cast belongs to you. You're the cranky mentor, the snarky familiar, the innocent kids, and the predators who feed on them. In **Mage**'s bizarre world, you could become the North Wind, too... or an avatar of Crow, a city-spirit, or the vengeful angel who's come to purge the world of sin. *Anything* can assume a personality in **Mage**; if an Ecstatic stoner Awakens his herbs, you could find yourself playing the laid-back spirit of Pot Incarnate. (For details, see ***Mary Jane*** in **Appendix I**.)

When you play those characters, have fun with them. Decide upon memorable traits, like a hooked nose or unusual accent, just so long as you avoid obnoxious ethnic slurs. **(See *Roleplaying the Other* in Chapter Six, p. 258).** You don't need to fill out character sheets for every character, of course, but some scribbled notes can help you keep each persona straight. Whenever possible, work up names, agendas, and a distinct feature or two, even for your walk-on roles. Dynamic characters, after all, make for interesting stories.

Motivations and Tactics

As we've seen in **Chapter Six**, all characters have agendas. Everybody wants *something*, and certain folks will do almost anything to meet those needs. Think like an actor, then, when you assume a character. Ask yourself *What do I want? What stands in my way? What will I do to get it?*, and then let the answers guide your performance. Those motivations can keep your players on their toes and might surprise even you.

Motivations also help you flesh out Backgrounds Traits. Allies, Backup, Mentors, Familiars, and so forth are far more interesting (and far less predictable) when they *want* something from their associated heroes. That's especially true when those desires aren't immediately obvious; sure, the Backup agents expect to get paid, but what does an Ally *really* desire from the mage who holds that Background Trait? Are there genuine feelings of loyalty and friendship, or is that Ally pursuing a hidden agenda? From the Storyteller's perspective, unpredictable alliances offer excellent complications and hooks for your tale – especially if the Background character happens to be a living Sanctum, Node, or Wonder with an agenda of its own. (See ***Inhuman Entities***, below.)

Strong motivations drive dynamic characters. And so, whenever possible, frame a supporting character's motivations in compelling terms and short-term goals. A barista, for example, wants to *score a big tip*; a vampire wants to *recruit an ally*; whereas a cop wants to *get home alive*. Such agendas invest your characters with personality, give you more material to play with, and tell you a lot about your character's offstage life. After all, a cop who wants *to get home alive* must have some reason to believe he won't make it and something (or some*one*) worth living for. With such motivations, that cop suddenly becomes more than just a faceless walk-on character. He's got emotional attachments, reasons to avoid danger, and potential personality quirks that might come out as he interacts with the player characters.

Tactics: The Means to an End

To reach those goals, characters use *tactics*: the means they employ to achieve their desired ends. Those tactics inspire a character's choices and activities. The cop, for instance, will try to talk his way through potential hazards, might negotiate to avoid conflict, and could duck and run if violence erupts. Now your cop has a sense of individuality and an unpredictable streak – traits that make him far more compelling than your typical list of stats.

A single dynamic word can often tell you what those tactics might be. The cop could be described as *wary*, the barista might be *flirtatious*, and the vampire might act in a *flattering* way. By noting the character's tactics, you give yourself a miniature script for the things that character might say and do. After all, the *ingratiating* vampire won't act the same way that a *condescending*, *fearful*, or *indifferent* vampire would act.

Covert Agendas

Mage's world is rarely obvious. People often use deceptive tactics to pursue *covert*, or hidden, agendas. The ingratiating vampire, for example, would be acting like a genuine friend, but in reality she's trying to win a powerful ally over to her cause. That flirtatious barista's angling for a tip, not a date. The cop's apparent good nature masks his fear of impending death. By giving covert agendas to your Storyteller characters, you keep your players on their toes while investing your chronicle with a dramatic sense of unpredictability. Beyond that, however, you also reflect the ambiguous and often surprising nature of reality – a key element of **Mage** – and the human drives and individual lives that lie behind dismissive labels like "Sleepers" and "the Masses."

A Reason to Believe

Beyond the short-term actions that people take when pursing their agendas, there's another good reason to think about a Storyteller character's motivations when you're running a **Mage** chronicle: *beliefs influence activities, and needs influence beliefs*. Especially in the modern world, where people are freer to believe what they choose to believe, folks tend to select beliefs that meet their needs. Poor people need to believe in something better for themselves, rich people needs to believe there's a reason that they have more than other people get, folks in warlike cultures need to believe there's a reason that they subject themselves to endless violence, and folks who cultivate serenity need strong principles that help them cope with their animal passions.

The ***Common Mage Paradigms*** shown in **Chapter Ten** reflect worldviews based in need and circumstance. Beliefs, after all, let people face the complexities of life. For **Mage** players and Storytellers, the needs behind a paradigm inform the reasons for that belief. Folks in a technological society, for example, tend to place a lot of faith in technology because that technology allows them to live happier, healthier, easier lives.

If a mage wants to change a paradigm, then, he must choose one that meets the needs of the people within that area... or change their needs to meet his paradigm. The primary reason for the Technocracy's domination in the modern world, for example, is simple: advanced technology makes life easier for the Masses. Why would Joe Average choose to live in the woods, worshipping the Old Gods, when he could have fast food, a warm house, and the Internet? If the Verbenae want to get Joe and Jane Average to accept their beliefs, then, they have to give those people a *reason* to change those beliefs. Those mages must understand the motivations that drive those people, then either change the paradigm to suit the Sleepers' needs (as technopaganism might do), or change the needs so that the new paradigm suits the new set of needs. On the sunny side of the street, such changes make life better for the Sleepers, so that the people accept new beliefs that reward their faith. At the darkest end of the spectrum, those changes can make life so hideous that the Sleepers accept new beliefs out of desperation, if only to keep worse things at bay. It's been said that fear lies at the heart of faith... and in real world, that saying is not always wrong. There are reasons, after all, that religious folks often use the term *God-fearing* as a reflection of righteousness.

As a **Mage** Storyteller, you command the powers of need and belief among your characters. You decide what they need and determine how those needs suit their beliefs. If and when your players want to tilt the balance of the Ascension war, winning people over to the mages' chosen worldview, you can reveal the needs of your characters and then suggest how the mages can meet those needs... and thus, also shift the people's beliefs. If, for example, Jinx shows the wary cop how her bonds with the Goddess Risk and the Spirit of Seattle help her to stay alive, that cop might adopt the same beliefs... assuming, of course, that they benefit him as well.

For more details about changing the landscape of reality, see ***The Reality Challenge*** in **Chapter Nine**, **(p. 432)**, and ***Reality Zones*** in **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 611-617)**.

Inhuman Entities

Mages deal with non-human characters too: spirits, demigods, robots, familiars, demons, angels, totem entities, and the essences of cities. As the Storyteller, you get to play god (literally and figuratively) and take on the personalities and motivations of these weird entities. Such characters clearly aren't "people" in the usual sense. And yet, from the Storyteller's perspective, they have the same sorts of wants and needs, even if they express them in very different ways.

When you're playing a non-human character, choose distinct mannerisms that mark that entity: a weird voice, disturbing description, archaic mode of speaking, and so forth. Use jagged movements, or very smooth body language, when acting out that character. Describe how that character affects its surroundings, too: the way the light dims and the wind blows cold when the demon manifests, the musky smell and shiny eyes of the talking wolf, the way the air pressure builds when an air elemental swirls into existence... that sort of thing. By crafting an uncanny atmosphere, you can invoke a sense of mystery when such characters appear. A HIT Mark, for example, seems far more menacing when it speaks in a deep voice with oddly flat inflections, glancing down at the bloody holes in its bleeding meat where the glint of metal shines through.

That sense of mystery is essential when such characters appear. *Don't refer to weird entities by blunt game terms*. That HIT Mark is just a list of stats if you call him by that name. If, on the other hand, you simply describe what your players perceive, and then let them draw their own conclusions, then your killer cyborg becomes a lethal force of nature, not just another set of health levels that need to be destroyed.

No matter how weird or mysterious an entity might be, remember this: *everyone wants SOMETHING, and that "something" isn't always obvious*. Provide motivations, tactics, and covert agendas to inhuman entities as well – and then throw in the occasional surprise. If that HIT Mark would rather hang out and discuss *My Little Pony* than turn mages into hamburger,

he suddenly becomes a very different character. A crow spirit who prefers fast food over carrion, a demon who loves to play chess, a tree spirit who wants to see the world... such entities keep your **Mage** chronicle hopping and your players engaged.

Relationships

No mage is an island. Every one of them, regardless of affiliation, has allies and lovers, relatives and acquaintances of some kind or other. Even misanthropic hermits have animal friends and spirit allies. A truly solitary character has no place in a roleplaying troupe to begin with, because such groups are social by their nature. Therefore, each character in your chronicle has a network of relationships, any one of which can provide story material.

When your players create their characters, ask them about the significant people in each character's life. Have them describe these people, and then make notes you can work from later. These "people," incidentally, don't need to be human; in a mage's world, animals, spirits, and so forth are people too. Penny Dreadful's cat, Mister Mistoffelees, is as much a person as the pretty boy next door, and the cat probably has a more interesting personality. Once you've got a few ideas, bring those characters into the story whenever it seems appropriate to do so. Old Aunt Marie probably won't show up in a Horizon Realm, after all, but she might provide the heart of the chronicle when things take place on Earth.

From the Storyteller's perspective, such relationships serve several purposes. Such people fill out the background, obviously, but they also provide flashes of color and emotional leverage that can move your players to action. They personify Background Traits, furnish story hooks, and help you give a face to the abstract ideals of the Ascension War. It's one thing, after all, to fight to protect the Masses on general principle; when it's your next-door neighbor in the wheelchair, though, it suddenly becomes far more important to make sure he stays safe when mad cultists kick in your own door.

Setting

Like character provides the *who*, setting provides your story's *where* and *when*. In most cases, it's more than just a backdrop, too. Especially in the world of **Mage**, a setting has a huge effect upon the mages and their activities. It establishes an atmosphere, determines obstacles, establishes the set of localized reality, and often becomes a character in its own right.

Your story's setting often influences the chronicle's activities. A tale set in Seattle's underground during a cold November, for instance, has a very different tone than one set in that city's Capitol Hill district during a sunny July. And given the cosmic scope of **Mage**, your range of potential settings is essentially infinite. One week's session could find the heroes hitchhiking along I-40 in the middle of a snowstorm, whereas the next week's tale might drop them in a haunted forest, an industrial laboratory, a Boschian hell, or the mindscape of a demented colleague who's lost in a Victorian steampunk dream... and a single story arc could involve them all!

Use the Net, Dude!

The Internet can be a Storyteller's best friend. Thanks to Google Earth, the various Internet map options, and the ability to search for blueprints, schematics, and images of all kinds, you can whip up helpful visuals within seconds. When you place a story in a real-world setting, a Google Earth fix on that location can give you eyes on the local geography – perhaps even score you a street-level panorama of that location as the characters would see it.

Beyond its obvious capacity for visual reference material (maps, symbols, evocative pictures, and so forth), the Internet can also help you dig up information, find and play cool music, establish a Wiki page for your chronicle, and employ all kinds of other tools that Game Masters would have given their eye-teeth to obtain two decades ago. All hail the Virtual Age!

Atmosphere and Description

Settings, like characters, have distinct personalities. One restaurant might feel friendly, with good smells and friendly waitstaff, whereas another feels menacing, with disconcerting pictures on the walls and an undercurrent of fear among the patrons. As the Storyteller, you can enhance chronicle settings by providing memorable *atmospheres and descriptions* as often as possible. Such details make your story come alive and often influence the flow of action and the choices that your players make.

Let's say, for example, that Jinx and Synder grab lunch in a neighborhood café. It's been a good day for panhandling, so they can afford something nice for a change. As the Storyteller, you could simply tell your players, "You go to lunch" and then simply move on. But if, instead, you describe a small Indian restaurant with a rich Tandoori scent, peeling wallpaper, faded prints of medieval Indian people riding elephants, and a waiter whose ragged nails and eager demeanor suggest a desperate business owner who's trying to stay afloat, then that lunch adds color to your chronicle. Now let's say that the owner's wife glares at the homeless girls from behind the counter, and something smells *not quite right* about the food; now you've added tension into the scene. Maybe there's a bloodstain in the bathroom, or the sound of arguing or weeping in the kitchen; *now* you're inviting the players to take an interest in the restaurant. The richer the atmosphere and description of a place, the more evocative that setting becomes.

Alive to the Senses

No place, no matter how simple it might appear to be, is "simple" when you get to know it. Every tree or street corner has its own unique features and history. Mages tend to be more sensitive to such things than most people are, and so the personality of a given place can reinforce the inherent magick of the Tapestry. Check out the **Prelude** and the ways in which Lee Ann and John Courage perceive their surroundings, and

then present your own descriptions with a similar view to detail and atmosphere. Characters with the Awareness Ability, high Avatar Backgrounds, keen senses, or a habit of scanning their surroundings with perception-enhancing magicks notice things that most people miss. By describing those vivid perceptions, you can show your players just how incredible a mage's world can be.

To play up those perceptions, go beyond the usual senses of sight and sound. Describe to your players how a room *smells*, *feels*, or *tastes*. Remember, too, that sensitive people can perceive emotional impressions in the air as vibes or other tactile sensations. Strong passions leave powerful impressions on the landscape, so emphasize those vivid descriptions to reveal clues about the setting's past, present, or – especially when Time Sphere magick is involved – its potential future. For advice about an especially helpful technique in this sort of story-telling, check out the sidebar called ***Sense Memory***, and then put its suggestions to good use.

Metaphysical Sensations

The uncanny currents of Quintessence, Resonance, Synergy, Nodes, gateways, and other paranormal phenomena have sensory effects as well. Most mages can sense energy and determine its flavor even when there's no physical contact involved. Strong Resonance and Synergy cast impressions that sensitive characters can perceive and potentially read. One location might ripple with corruption even when the sun shines on its apparently peaceful ground; another could hold a calming sense of peace that soothes a troubled soul in the middle of a storm.

Magickal workings can ripple the environment as well, especially when the Correspondence, Entropy, Forces, Spirit, and Time Spheres are involved. Mages who understand those Spheres stand a pretty decent chance of sensing familiar magicks... which can, in turn, warn your heroes (or their enemies!) of some impending spell. Let's say that Nix has a few dots in the Time Sphere; a faint breeze that smells like the past and future shaking hands could alert Nix to the presence of a rival mage who's using temporal magicks to attack Nix by surprise. In game terms, you can offer a vague description and see if your player gets the hint; if so, let him roll Perception + Alertness... and if he succeeds, let him catch sight of the magick before it strikes.

Sensation, Poetry and Metaphor

Perception is the first thing a mage learns about when she begins studying a Sphere. And so, despite their tendency toward intellectual analysis – sometimes perhaps *because* of it! – mages can be extremely sensual. That's especially true of Ecstatics and shamans, who use sensation as an instrument **(see *Sex and Sensuality*, Chapter Ten, p. 598)**, but it can apply to other mages as well. Awakened people perceive a sensuous world that transcends the limited perceptions of the Masses. To capture the essence of that world, then, you could employ *poetry and metaphor*: evocative imagery that transcends straightforward descriptions.

Poetic descriptions operate beyond the level of everyday thought. By using them, you open your mind – and the minds of your players – to a more abstract way of thinking. Writers like H.P. Lovecraft and Storm Constantine use baroque language to reveal dreamlike vistas to their readers. Filmmakers like Darren Aronofsky (*The Fountain*, *Black Swan*) and musicians like Trent Reznor employ similar techniques with other media, mixing deeply symbolic sounds and images in with more conventional impressions in order to invoke sublime experiences. Of course, this sort of thing *can* be overdone... or worse, done *badly*. As a **Mage** Storyteller, save this approach for situations where it'll have maximum impact – and then bring your best game to the table when you do.

Differing Perspectives?

Along similar lines, different mages tend to perceive their surroundings in different ways. A woods-loving Verbena would regard the city as a reeking sprawl of environmental ruin, whereas a proud scion of Iteration X views that same city as a shining testimonial to the power of technology. An imaginative Storyteller could describe the same setting through differing perspectives – each one suited to the characters in question. That's an advanced technique, one that could easily become confusing while bogging down the game. Still, an occasional situation in which the characters all perceive the same landscape in vastly different ways could rattle your players' expectations while underscoring the idea of subjective reality within the world of **Mage**.

Sense Memory

A potent acting and writing technique, *sense memory* involves setting up mental "files" filled with memories of various sensations. When you find yourself in a place or situation you want to recall, take several minutes to focus on the various impressions you feel. Close your eyes and concentrate on *hearing*, as deeply as you can, every layer of sound. Open a mental file based on the place or situation in question, make a mental note of the sounds you hear, and then close that file, move on to scent, and repeat the process. Moving from hearing to smell, to taste, to touch, to that nameless sense of awareness that hovers somewhere in between all the other senses, establish mental files for each one of them. When you're finished, close your eyes again, shut the mental file drawer, and go back to what you'd been doing before.

Sense memory not only lets you recall places and circumstances long after you've left them behind, but it also helps you appreciate the richness of your surroundings while you're still there. By opening yourself up and truly *concentrating* on each sense, you'll deepen your understanding of the world we so often miss.

Settings as Characters

Sometimes – especially when you're dealing with magick – the world around you really *is* alive. Cities have spirits, winds have names, and the walls actually *can* listen to what you say. Powerful Nodes and Wonders often have sentient consciousness, and certain types of magick can awaken the slumbering spirits within a place, item, or element. In such situations, your setting becomes a character in every sense of that word, with needs, tactics, and agendas that can rival any human character.

Live settings and objects occasionally communicate in voices anyone can hear. More often, though, they express their desires through shifts in the environment: chilly breezes, books falling open to important pages, a pulse or thrill of eagerness that surges through the area in question, and other signs of sentient activity. A haunted house might feel displeased, a dagger can be thirsty, and a car could have its own ideas about travel and destinations. Most people won't notice such things, of course... or, if they do, they'll write those perceptions off as anthropomorphism – after all, *everybody* knows that houses, knives, and cars don't think for themselves! Certain mages, however, catch clues about the living world and recognize what's really going on. Witches, shamans, Ecstatics, and technopagans tend to be quicker on the uptake in such settings, but any mage whose beliefs accept weird shit might find herself staring into an abyss that's staring right back at her.

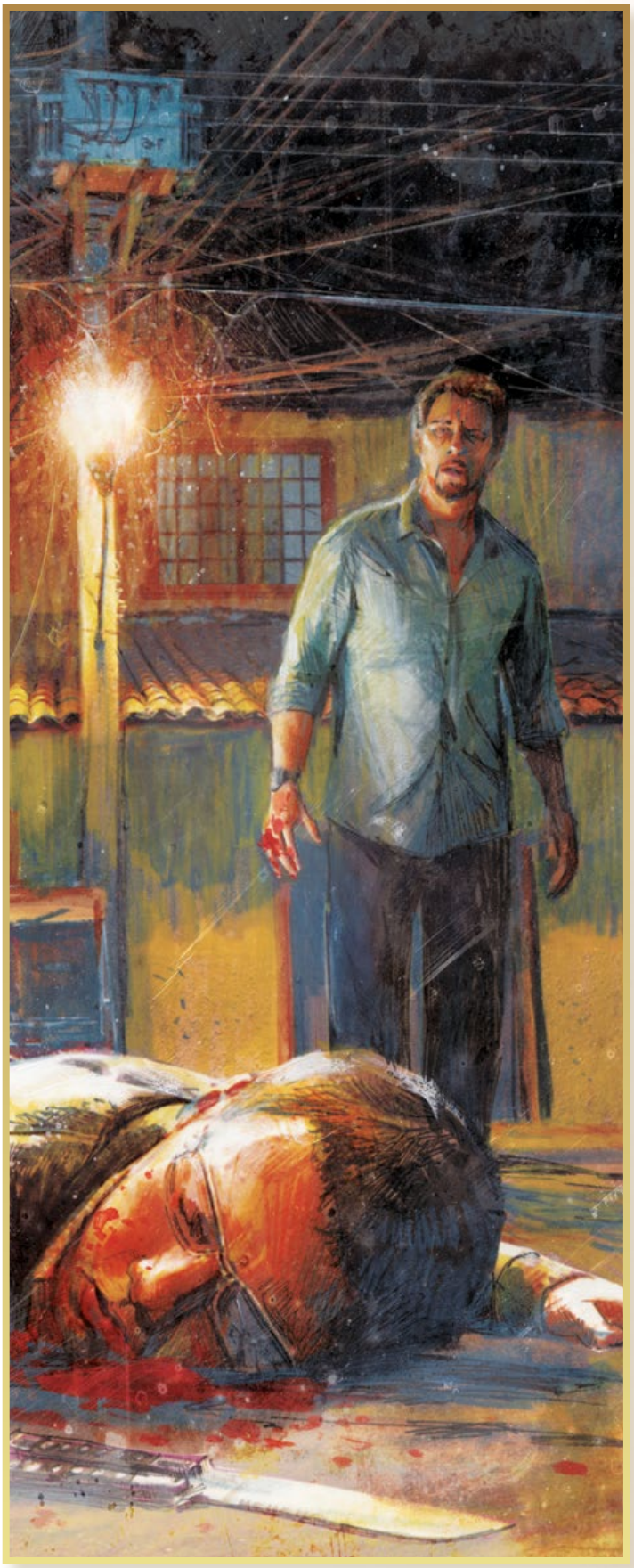
Environmental Threats

Aware or not, settings can be dangerous. Blizzards, deserts, and exploding fuel depots don't need to be malicious in order to kill someone. Especially in the wild frontiers of the Ascension War and Otherworlds, your players will face environmental hazards that make every move a risk. As the Storyteller, then, it's your business and pleasure to keep the heat on and the ground shaky.

Dangerous settings provide exciting *set pieces*, as described in the sidebar nearby. **Chapter Nine** features a selection of ***Environmental Hazards*** in the section of that name (see pp. 435-444). When mountains crumble and storms hit, those systems provide you with the tools of character unease. Remember, too, that a hazard doesn't have to be obvious or epic in order to be dangerous. A patch of ice can end a mage's career just as surely as a bolt of lightning can.

Conflict

When different parties seek opposing goals, conflict is inevitable. Such disputes range from the Earth-shaking battles of the Ascension War to the intimate – yet still painful – spats between lovers.



Despite common preconceptions, most conflicts are neither life-and-death affairs nor duels between Good and Evil. Instead, they boil down to people trying to meet their needs. When those needs clash, the people involved clash too.

Tradition defines three essential sorts of conflict:

- *Character against Character*, wherein opposing people collide;
- *Character against Environment*, wherein the primary character(s) clash with the world at large; and...
- *Character against Self*, wherein conflict is self-contained.

In **Mage**, all three conflicts can come into play within a single story. When Jinx fights off a would-be mugger, that's *Character against Character*; when she tries to survive a harsh winter storm, that's *Character against Environment*; and when she enters Quiet, that's *Character against Self*. Those conflicts can cross over, too: a seductive drug dealer from a rival gang brings Jinx into all three conflicts at once. And in **Mage**, more than in most other storytelling games, an existential crisis may be as deadly as a firefight.

Goals, High Stakes, and Common Ground

Chantry rivalries, clashing ideologies, romantic tensions, and other subtle conflicts can be as intense as exploding laboratories. The key to such intensity is simple: *make your players care about what's going on*. When they've got an honest emotional investment in the outcome of such conflicts, you don't need pyrotechnics to keep your players in suspense.

Conflicts demand three things: *opposing goals* (a reason that the characters disagree), *high stakes* (something the characters are willing to fight for), and *common ground* (the reason they don't just walk away; see the section of that name, earlier in this chapter). When these elements collide, the characters face a conflict. If they can negotiate a solution, then everybody wins. The higher the stakes and the greater the opposition, however, the more intense that conflict becomes.

As an example, check out this book's **Prelude**. Lee Ann and John Courage belong to factions with violently opposing goals. Both mages believe strongly in who they are and what they do... strongly enough to kill and die for it. Even so, they share a history of fighting together against mutual enemies, one of whom is chasing John Courage. The conflict involves them each overcoming their innate hostility (and the manipulative tendencies within each character) long enough to unite against the real enemy... something they do right about the time that enemy catches up with them.

That **Prelude** also underscores an important point, especially in the often-martial world of roleplaying games: *conflict doesn't have to be physically violent*. Nasty glances, pointed words, passive-aggressive manipulation, and even apparent surrender that isn't *really* giving in... they're all forms of conflict that have nothing to do with losing health levels. In real life, most people get through their entire lives without ever throwing or taking a hard punch. And yet conflict is universal. The stakes and weapons vary, but opposition remains.

Good vs. Evil?

The **Prelude**'s conflict also points out another fact: *very few people consider themselves villains*. Most folks feel they're doing the right thing even when what they've done is monstrous. The old Good vs. Evil dynamic is pretty rare in real life; hell, even the Nazis considered themselves to be epic heroes in a decadent world. Given the subjective morality of **Mage**, such clear-sided conflicts – unless they involve the Fallen – tend to be nonexistent. The truth, in **Mage**, is this: *every* side, even that of the Nephandi, is heroic and horrific in its way. Pure Good is as absent as Pure Evil, and even the most virtuous mages can be real dicks when you get in their way.

(Okay, the Nephandi *are* pretty Evil with a capital E. Still, in their philosophy, they're simply pragmatic enough to realize that the universe is fucked up, and enlightened enough to be on the winning side of ultimate extinction.)

Black and White conflicts, then, aren't really true to the spirit of **Mage**. As a Storyteller, you can play up the ambiguity of the Ascension War and its many small reflections by showing that *everyone* – even a Nephandus – has a valid point of view, understandable goals, and some vision of Ultimate Truth. That doesn't mean, of course, that folks won't kill each other over differing opinions – they will and often *do*. Still, keep each character's motivations in mind, and drop little hints about those goals and the ultimate humanity of each antagonist, even as those antagonists blast their rivals into atoms... "for the common good," of course!

Escalation

Actions have consequences, so conflicts tend to escalate in intensity until someone either defuses the conflict or ends it in some other way. Hurt feelings often breed bitter words. Words turn to insults, insults to shouting, shouting to slammed doors and very often worse. Unless a character does something to *de*-escalate the situation – offers a compromise, walks away, talks everybody down, and so forth – a conflict stands a good chance of growing. That's especially true among mages, whose incredible powers come from the strength of their convictions.

In the Storyteller's role, you've got the power to throw fuel or water on that fire. By adding complications to a conflict, you can escalate your player's response to it. And by offering potential resolutions, you give the player paths out of the growing conflict. If Kelly decides to have George's Syndicate bosses order him to stage some "accidental" fires around the Appalachian woods, his loyalty comes into conflict with the goals of his companions, and the conflict escalates. If she brings in a forest spirit who's powerful enough to de-escalate the situation, Kelly presents her players with an option other than violence. In many cases, though, the Storyteller should simply lay out possibilities and then let the players determine the flow of conflict. Given the incredible powers of Awakened

The Memorable Set Piece

Exploding airships. Thundering nightclubs. Car chases and impossible stunts. Hollywood refers to such scenes as *set pieces*: dramatic backdrops for explosive action. Take a cool location, add high stakes, throw in a ticking time bomb, and you've got a set piece. When James Bond chases the parkour terrorist near the beginning of *Casino Royale*, that chase becomes a memorable set piece.

A strong set piece combines novelty and emotional stakes with a dramatic location and a sense of audacity. The bloodbath at the beginning of *Blade* remains a classic set piece because it takes an audience surrogate (the dude with the pretty lady), lures him out of his everyday world, throws the story's main characters in his face, and then explodes into an orgy of violence through the absurd yet thrilling idea of vampires bathing in strobe-lit showers of blood. By the time Blade shows up, the audience is hooked. *That's* how a great set piece works: Emotion + Stimulation + Action = Wow.

Like any other device, of course, the set piece can be overdone. When the same things happen again and again, with no real sense of investment in the outcome, mere action becomes boring. As a Storyteller, then, craft imaginative set pieces that take your players by surprise. Combine cool settings – wreckage, nightclubs, Mount Rushmore, whatever – with a sharp hook and a vital outcome, throw in something your players don't see coming, and guide the action to an exciting payoff.

magick, and the temperaments of the people who use it, the outcome of almost *any* conflict remains fairly unpredictable.

Complications

Among all World of Darkness characters, mages may be the most complex. Nothing, it seems, is ever straightforward in their world. George's bosses may be Technocrats, but his immediate supervisor holds a secret allegiance to the Fallen. The mystics from the wilderness retreat turn out to have several internal schisms based upon romantic relationships, and the spirit of the forest is frankly sick of them all. The various covert agendas and hidden conflicts complicate the apparently simple goal of *Save the Woods from the Bad Guys*. The lines of conflict and allegiance blur, and every character must watch the shadows for some new and unexpected trap.

Complications often escalate a conflict, too. The tension between Kevin's trickster and Sandi's Progenitor rises if those characters wind up sleeping with one another. Maybe George's hitman takes offense at such intimacy, or Inky's bouncer wants to join the action too. Maybe the trickster was already involved with a forest witch who's none too thrilled with his new affair. Tensions escalate, and no one knows which way the wind will blow once the fire starts.

Tension

Tension comes from a word meaning "to stretch," and that's what tension in a story does: it stretches the characters and audience on a rack of complications, tightening the strain until something pops. As a Storyteller, you can increase the tension within a conflict by keeping things from happening until just the right moment, dropping pauses and delays into the pacing of your story. Let's say that George's hitman plans to have a little chat with Kevin's trickster; just as he prepares to approach his rival, the Storyteller has a cute little witch kid ask the hitman to investigate the strange sounds she heard over by the creek. By adding both a delay (the child) and a complication (the mysterious sounds), Kelly ups the tension and stretches out the conflict with a bit of delicious antici... *pation*.

How much tension and how many complications should you add? That depends upon your troupe. Keep an eye on your players, and watch their reactions as events unfold. If they seem to be getting bored, or lost, or frustrated with the various delays, pick up the pace. If they're hanging on every word you say, let them dangle just a little bit before you let the action explode.

Deadly Force

Despite their capacity for carnage, mages don't generally fight to the death if they don't have to. They don't heal like werewolves or vampires unless there's Life magick involved, and they lack the inner beasts that drive other Night-Folk to violence. Enlightened and typically intelligent, mages prefer to use subtler forms of warfare whenever possible. Even the Technocracy usually keeps the HIT Marks and power armor in reserve for use as a last resort. And so, despite the massive ***Combat*** section in **Chapter Nine**, conflicts in **Mage** tend to be more mental, emotional, social, and spiritual than physical.

That said, the Awakened can blow shit up with the best of them. If and when fireballs start flying, the resulting havoc is impressive... and *dangerous*... for everyone involved.

Being mortal, mages have more to lose in a fight than their monstrous contemporaries. A raging werewolf can take a tank-shell in the chest and live to howl about it, but a good kick in the chops can send the average mage to the hospital or the grave. And then there's Paradox – the constant spectre of Awakened violence. Any wizard who tosses lightning bolts too freely, regardless of her paradigm, is looking for a smackdown of epic proportions. As a **Mage** Storyteller, then, remind your players of the consequences of deadly force... when need be, by making examples of them.

Lethal violence, in **Mage**, tends to be risky and dramatic... and therefore rare. When such violence *does* erupt, make it scary.

Let it *hurt*. Show blasted ruins and weeping widows. Post APBs to every cop in town. Have Resonance ripple in the wake of atrocities. And unless you plan to run a high-adventure game, remind your players that *mages don't soak lethal and aggravated damage* unless they use potent and often vulgar magick. When those vulgar spells pee in the reality pool, have Paradox nail the guilty parties. By giving teeth to violence, you'll underline the essential humanity of mages and stress that magick, like force, has its costs.

The Good Death

As a general rule, a Storyteller shouldn't let random chance kill a player character. Unless the player and his mage do something truly stupid, it's generally good policy to give your player an escape hatch from mortal harm. Maybe those seven levels of aggravated damage knocked him into a coma and left him in a heap of bloody meat. He'll need healing, of course, but he's not dead *YET*. Death ought to be reserved for dramatic moments of heroism or disaster, not a chance fall of the dice. After all, heroes don't often trip over a curb and die.

That said, death *should* remain a real possibility in **Mage**, especially if that death comes about through spectacular acts of heroism, stupidity, or pride. The Akashic Brother who tries to school a werewolf deserves a bloodily ornate end; if that's what the dice tell you, then let it happen. Paradox ought to remain a lethal threat, and tackling a HIT Mark should be something only a crazy or desperate mage would attempt.

Thanks to advanced Life magick, it's possible to bring dead characters back from the grave. That sort of thing tends to be vulgar, of course, especially if said character endured an especially public and unsurvivable demise, but it *can* be done. A character who's been resurrected, though, winds up marked by the experience. The grim temperament of many shamans and Thanatoic mages attests to the legacy of their death and rebirth. However, other folks who've stared mortality in the face and returned to the living world enjoy a deeper appreciation for life's miracles. Such people, having survived death, understand how precious it is to live.

Resolution

All things – good and otherwise – must come to an end. As a Storyteller, you'll need to guide your stories toward eventual *resolution*: the satisfying end of a tale well told.

A strong resolution requires three elements:

- A payoff, with drama that suits the intensity of the conflict;
- A sense of finality, through which things are put to rest; and...
- Emotional satisfaction, for a job well done.

Without these elements, the resolution becomes an *anticlimax* – all tease, no payoff. If Kelly resolves her woodland conflict with a sudden offstage strike from the Friends of Courage, her players will rightfully feel cheated. In any sort of story, interactive or otherwise, the audience must feel like they've completed an important journey – one in which the goal was worth the fight. Without that sense of accomplishment, even if that accomplishment is tragedy, the audience has been wasting its time.

Dark Victory

"Accomplishment" doesn't always mean "success." Even in a game, the heroes can lose while the players win. *Romeo and Juliet* is not exactly a successful game scenario, but it surely offers a satisfying – if tragic – climax.

How can you, the Storyteller, turn a bloody reversal into a dark victory? It's simple, really: make sure that your heroes achieve some greater end with their sacrifice. If George's hitman goes down in a hail of gunfire, make sure he takes that Infernal Manager down with him. If the heroes lose and the forest burns, make certain that some spirit takes root in the ruins and begins to redeem the ashes of that failure. Inky's bouncer might wind up losing her job, but the connections she makes over the course of this adventure help her find a new vocation outside the club scene. The vital element in any resolution – tragic or otherwise – involves a sense of achievement. To feel satisfied, your players need to make a difference, even if their characters perish in the process.

(Yes, it's possible to run games based around the theme of existential futility. A lot of people would not enjoy such a game, though.)

For a Storyteller, the most satisfying resolution usually involves a bunch of happy players whose victories have been won through hard work, good luck, and some really killer roleplaying. To that end, then, give your players something to strive for, something to struggle against, and some tangible accomplishment at the end of the tale. Resolve the primary conflict, even if you leave loose ends for future stories. That way, each story you share with your players will have a clear and satisfying climax... one that will, with luck, leave the door open for future adventures.

Coming Soon...?

Okay, so the forest has been saved, the conspiracy stands revealed, and the shaky coalition of heroes shares an unlikely bond. Now what?

In a continuing series of books or TV seasons, the main characters carry over into a new set of situations. The framework might shift but the core remains. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the characters faced a different Big Bad every season, moved from high school to college to adulthood, suffering losses (Oz), enjoying gains (Spike), and often doing both (Tara). The heroes changed – sometimes drastically – but retained their common ground. In game terms, a continuing chronicle works the same way. Your player characters evolve **(see *Character Progress*, Chapter Six, pp. 335-339)**. Some leave, others enter, and all of them share the bond that keeps them strong.

When setting the scene for a new adventure, drop occasional hints into the current story that show where things could be headed soon. Introduce minor characters who'll play major roles in the next story, or craft new adventures from passing moments in the chronicle. Build upon the things your heroes do; if Jinx, for example, makes friends with a vampire, feature that vampire's family in an upcoming story. Most importantly, *let the chronicle find its own flow*. Be open to unexpected change.

Mage revolves around the theme of change, so your chronicle will probably change too. Street-kids might become executives while scientists pursue the arcane Arts. Your settings could range from the rain-swept Seattle streets to the backstage of the universe. As the Storyteller, you should suit those changes to the nature of your troupe; a cabal of Ecstatic shamans probably won't do well if the setting jumps to the world of industrial espionage. So long as those shifts fit in naturally with the evolution of your character group, however, your **Mage** chronicle can take many unexpected turns.

The Deeper Level

A rich story has deeper levels too: *themes* that reflect the story-teller's intentions, *moods* that grant emotional atmosphere, and a *tone* that conveys a particular attitude. We touched on theme and mood way back in the **Introduction**, but your own chronicle can range beyond the overall ideals of **Mage** and into territory that you create yourself.

Theme

What, beyond the simple chain of events, is your tale *about?* What ideas are you trying to convey? Things are rarely simple in the Awakened world, and so you'll want to have at least one theme – and possibly others, too – in each **Mage** story you tell.

Looking back to the **Prelude**, you can see several themes evolving through that tale. Beyond the obvious ideas like *Find strength in numbers* and *Put rivalries aside*, there's the *Contrast between the elemental and technological worlds*, an impression that *We all exist in several streams of time*, a strong suggestion that *Memory is unreliable*, and that *Trust is essential when Reality is at stake*. Both John and Lee Ann realize that *Wisdom is found in strange places*, *Reality demands compromise* and *Rules often need to be broken*. Meanwhile, the climactic firestorm reminds them that *There's no napping when the dogs of war are loose*, with the awful fate of Ryk reminding them (and us) that *The scope of that war, and the cost of negligence, are bigger than the mages involved*. That's just one short story, but it's loaded with ideas.

Within your own chronicle, run with ideas that matter deeply to you. If you're like Kelly, plant ecological concerns into your story; if you're hacked off at Congress, drop political bombs between the lines. **Mage** offers a broad (if often satirical) canvas for ideas, and its various elements let you work almost any theme into the plot. Although you should probably avoid building a soapbox too high – blatant hectoring gets old *real* fast – **Mage** makes an ideal vehicle for big ideas.

How can you get those ideas across in your game? Here are a few suggestions:

Symbolism

Mages exist in a rich world of symbols. All things can be perceived with several layers of meaning. A cup, to a mage, is never *just* a vessel for drinking water: it's also a reflection of nourishment and possibility; a symbol of feminine principles; a promise of vitality and refreshment; an extension of the Water element; and typically an emblem of class and culture, as shown by the differences between a simple wooden cup, an

Storyteller Resources

The following books provide helpful advice for Storytellers who want to hone their narrative chops:

The Art of Dramatic Writing, by Lajos Egri.

The Art of Storytelling, by Nancy Mellon.

Violence: A Writer's Guide and *Facing Violence*, by Rory Miller.

Bullies, Bastards & Bitches: How to Write the Bad Guys of Fiction, by Jessica Page Morrell.

The Complete Kobold Guide to Game Design, by Wolfgang Baur and other contributors.

Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering, by Robin Laws & Steve Jackson.

Creating the Story: Guides for Writers, by Rebecca Rule & Susan Wheeler.

On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft, by Stephen King.

Interactive Storytelling: Techniques for 21st Century Fiction, by Andrew Glassner.

The Mythic Imagination: The Quest for Meaning Through Personal Mythology, by Stephen Larsen.

Supernatural Horror in Literature, by H.P. Lovecraft.

On that note, the ***TV Tropes wiki*** (http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HomePage) provides an invaluable resource for story-tellers of all kinds. Be warned, though: once you bring it up, you might get lost in it forever!

elegant wine glass, and a plastic Slurpee cup. Numbers, seasons, animals, flowers, raw materials, manufactured goods – *everything* can be invested with rich symbolic significance. Mages of all kinds look at their world through a symbolic perspective, and so you can say volumes by simply placing the right symbol in the right place.

As a **Mage** Storyteller, you'll probably want to keep several encyclopedias of symbolism close at hand. That way, you've got plenty of material to work with, and you have answers if and when a player asks you what that cup on the table *really* means. You can also have lots of fun, and add in levels of apparent yet enigmatic meaning, if you simply place symbolic objects throughout your story *and then never tell players what they mean*. The universe doesn't explain itself clearly, after all, and mages must usually infer meanings from the things they see. Those meanings won't always be correct – even Freud admitted that a pipe sometimes *is* just a pipe. Still, the symbol-laden realm of Awakened existence inspires mages (and players) to seek, observe, question, and interpret deeper levels in everything they see.

Contrasts

We often notice things more clearly when they're thrown into contrast by something else. White shows up better against black than against gray. So, in your **Mage** chronicle, emphasize ideas by accentuating strong contrasts: plants against pavement, blood against snow, Ecstatics against Men in Black. By juxtaposing such contrasting elements, you'll invest them with richer meanings and more obvious significance.

Although contrast reveals itself most vividly in objects (like Tupac Shakur's famous reference to "the rose that grew from concrete"), it also appears through contrasts of *ideas*. In the **Prelude**, a Technocrat quotes a mystic passage – a contrast that surprises his Ecstatic counterpart. Such contrasts deepen the mental and emotional spectrum of a tale by revealing unexpected layers to an apparently simple element. With them, you show that not even prophets can possibly understand *everything*.

In Kelly's chronicle, the contrast between primal woodlands and predatory machines brings out the nature of that conflict. A bulldozer shoving down ancient trees becomes an accurate, if unsubtle, reminder that *technology will fuck shit up*. If a tree then falls on that bulldozer, the same contrast can underscore an ironic (and probably amusing) counterpoint: *and Nature will fuck your shit up too*. In both cases, the symbolic contrast of bulldozer and trees makes a point larger than the events themselves.

Irony

Old hit songs aside, the term *irony* refers to something that means the opposite of what it appears to mean or that runs counter to the expected results. A tree that falls on the bulldozer that has been pushing down trees is ironic. A haughty Hermetic who misspells "Hermes" is ironic. Rain on your wedding day is not ironic – it's just bad luck. Irony is a potent tool in a Storyteller's

kit when it's used properly. Before using it, however, make sure you're using it the right way. Otherwise, the one on the receiving end of irony's *Kick Me* sign is you... and that'd be pretty ironic.

Significance

Things that appear to be important get invested with *significance*. Whether or not they actually *do* have a deeper meaning, people are likely to *perceive* significance in those things because those things seem to be important. A crow sitting on your windowsill might simply be a curious bird. If he happens to appear on that windowsill just as someone says, "*Oh, God, just give me a sign*," however, that bird becomes an avatar of divine significance, if only because the viewer *thinks* it is.

As they do with symbols, mages look for significant connections everywhere. One of the many talents of the magi, after all, involved reading omens from apparently meaningless events. As a Storyteller, you can plant all kinds of apparently significant apparent symbols throughout your story. Some of them – like the dog who shits on a city councilman's shoe – might be intentionally significant on your part. Others – like that crow outside the window – can be dropped into the story in order to make your players look for deeper layers. Because mages – and **Mage** players – tend to look for omens and symbols everywhere, your chronicle can seem rich and strange if you dress it up in significant contrasts and symbols. So long as you put intentionally symbolic weight behind *some* of those significant figures and events, your stories will acquire a mystic gravity that *suggests* even more than it actually *means*.

Mood

Where theme reflects *ideas*, mood reflects *emotions*. The first one thinks; the second one feels. For mages – who often spend way too much time in their heads – mood represents their intrinsic humanity. With cunning use of mood, you can shift a story's spectrum from intellectual conceits to rawer passions, reminding your players that even a cyborg has some kind of heart.

Despite the pervasive gloom of the well-named World of Darkness, **Mage** works best when you evoke a variety of moods. The contrast between despair and hope explored in the **Introduction** and **Chapter Three** remains a signature of **Mage: The Ascension**, but your own chronicle can sweep from cheerful euphoria to incandescent rage, depending on what you wish to portray.

Showing, Not Telling

How do you portray moods within your stories? First of all, by *showing, not telling*. Use atmosphere to set the mood. Instead of telling your players, "*Wow, it's a really depressing day*," describe the gunmetal skies weeping a slow but penetrating haze of rain, the soggy trash decomposing in the gutter, the trickle of water running down the collars of their coats, the chill that seeps up through the soles of their shoes, and the heaviness of their limbs as they trudge through gray fog. Describe an atmosphere and then let your players decide how they react to it. From a story-telling perspective, that's far more effective than telling them how their characters feel.

Description can be your biggest ally when you're trying to set a mood. Symbolism, as described above, can be a potent tool as well, although mages (and **Mage** players) tend to over-intellectualize about symbols, which can diffuse the emotional impact such omens might bring. Lush descriptions, however, about the physical landscape and emotional inner world can be marvelously evocative. Especially given their inhuman perceptions (also described above), the Awakened feel their surroundings more acutely than most people do. Use that to your advantage, then. Let your players experience the story as their characters move through it... and let that story move them in return. For details and suggestions, see the ***Atmosphere and Description*** section, earlier in this chapter, (pp. 357-358).

Enigma

Whatever that emotional landscape might be, remember that a sense of mystery is essential to **Mage**. Your descriptions, whenever possible, ought to suggest stuff that your heroes never clearly see. Drop hints about "*odd images you can't quite decipher*" and "*a sense that you're being watched*." Use unexplainable omens and undefined symbols. Whenever you're setting an obvious mood, add an undercurrent that contrasts with it: a faint sound of weeping underneath a comedic scene, a ludicrous detail in an otherwise harrowing crisis. Give a Nephandic badass a fondness for lollipops. Have a devil speak in rhymes, give a lascivious voice to a machine *and then don't explain why things are the way they are*. By implying questions that have no answers, you'll instill that essential atmosphere of mystery.

Whether you're running a game of high-rolling hijinks or deadly serious intrigues, the mood you set will influence the way your players experience that game. Given the diverse emotional textures within **Mage**, you've got a lot of material to work with. Beneath those emotional layers, however, there ought to be an enigmatic atmosphere that suggests cosmic implications behind ordinary events. In a mage's world, nothing is quite what it appears to be.

Tone

A variation on mood, *tone* reflects the overall approach you take. One Storyteller might prefer an intensely serious tone, whereas another favors a satirical tone and a third employs a bitterly defiant one. The differences between **Mage** editions could be seen as a shift in tone, from the extravagant philosophies of **Mage 1st Edition** to the passionate complexities of **Mage 2nd** and the gritty defiance of **Mage Revised**. Tone comes across in the words you choose, the images you highlight, the descriptions you invoke, the characters you create, and the things you have them do. From a Storyteller perspective, it's always a good idea to be aware of the tone you employ, if only so you can play it to your advantage.

Generally, tone comes across in the obvious things you do. The serious Storyteller above might present everything with straightforward earnestness, whereas the satirical one portrays exaggerated characters and events with large helpings

of sarcasm and absurdity. Mr. Bitterly Defiant rages against all machines with his *Fuck the Man!* approach, and all three of them incorporate elements of this book. Given **Mage**'s diverse possibilities, there's no single right way to run it, and although broad silliness often seems like the wrong tone for **Mage** overall, certain settings or story arcs might favor that as well, if only as a change of pace. Ultimately, tone is both a tool you can manipulate and a reflection of who you are at heart. Certain tools – description, theme, contrast, mood – can affect your tone, but those tools, and the way you use them, express the tone that feels most true to you.

Elements of Mage

Mage features some pretty challenging concepts. And as the Storyteller, you're kind of in the hot seat with regards to those concepts. How *does* someone run a Seeking, Resonance, or a Paradox backlash, anyway? The simple answer here is: *as deeply as you want, or as superficially as you can manage*. No one's gonna come down from on high and smack you for not running **Mage** correctly. As the Storyteller, you have the ability to dodge certain elements while delving into others. If something seems too complex to deal with, then just skip it and run the game you *want* to run.

That said, **Mage** is more than *D&D* with leather trench coats. A game in which folks run around blowing up gas mains with impunity isn't really **Mage**. The esoteric elements and themes give **Mage** its compelling atmosphere, so it's worth exploring them whenever possible. To that end, this section gives you tips and suggestions for handling things that go beyond game systems and into the realm of sheer imagination.

The Path

One of **Mage**'s defining features concerns the Path: that journey from Awakening to Ascension. Detailed in **Chapter One**, this journey is far more than an acquisition of power; in fact, the pursuit of power may be its biggest trap. This transformation of each character from a sleepy initiate to an Enlightened Master may be unique to **Mage**, and it's worth playing up that element when you run your chronicle.

How do you *do* that, exactly? From a Storyteller's perspective, how *does* one play up the gradual process of enlightenment and the various ways it might crash and burn? By emphasizing the various aspects of each mage's Path, by making them unique to each character, and by using the tools described earlier in this chapter to give your chronicle an epic feel that transcends raw violence and naked power.

Collaborative Questions

That's not a one-person job. To follow that Path, you must tap into the creativity of your players as well. After all, *someone else* could not tell *you* how your mage sees the world, her Avatar, and everything else besides. Only *you*, as a player, could describe those things to someone else. And so, in your role as Storyteller, encourage your players to take the creative reins in hand. After each gaming session, ask questions and invite creativity from your players. Look at the various ***Character Questions*** in **Chapter Six** (pp. 262-265), and then come up with your own variations on those questions – ones that suit your chronicle and the characters within it. Maybe ones like:

- Where do you see your Path headed these days?
- How are your beliefs and ideas about magick changing?
- What old preconceptions do you still hold on to, and which ones do you see changing into something else?
- How does your Avatar appear and relate to you these days?
- What challenges do you think you've faced, and which ones do you see rising up in the near future?

Taking notes from the player responses, incorporate those answers into the brainstorming for your next few episodes. You don't need to integrate all of that information at once, naturally. Once you've got it, though, you'll have a rough blueprint for the evolution of your chronicle as a whole. By asking such questions, and employing the answers, you bring your players into the evolution of the story. And in return, your players help to guide the chronicle toward greater results than the ones you might come up with on your own.

The Avatar: Portraying the Inner Self

Every mage has an individual relationship with the inner Avatar. It's "your own personal Jesus," or Buddha, or Lucifer, or Past/ Future Self, or whatever other guise it might wear. Every player, too, will have ideas about that Avatar. As the Storyteller, let your players create their Avatar of choice, and then run with those ideas... hopefully in directions your players might not expect.

As **Chapters One** and **Six** suggest, the Avatar gives you a massive creative canvas and many colors to paint with. Each Avatar is a character in its own right, and the details depend upon the things that you and the player in question want to do with an Avatar. That Avatar's Essence influences the personality of a given Avatar, and the mage's beliefs and faction play a huge part in the spirit's appearance, behavior, and interactions with the mage. An It X cyborg's Static Avatar might take the form of hovering geometric hallucinations, and a Wu Lung's

Primordial Avatar looks and acts like a revered ancestor. That appearance and personality might shift as the mage's Arete grows... but then, it might simply remain the same as that mage overcomes his early preconceptions. Ultimately, there *are* no hard and fast rules for an Avatar. You'll probably want to make notes about that guiding spirit, but this is one of the places where imagination trumps game systems.

Who plays the Avatar? Generally, I'd suggest that *you* do, possibly with input from the player in question. Camille, for instance, might see Jinx's Avatar as the seductive fallen angel Talon. **(See Chapter Six, p. 260).** Talon's kind of a shit, egging Jinx toward crazy feats of bravado and risk. Whenever Talon appears, Camille's Storyteller takes on that role. Camille gave Talon her essential form and personality, but the Storyteller could have his own ideas about where things go from there...

The Mystic Asshole

Here's a really important point that often gets lost, even in certain **Mage** sourcebooks: *Avatars can be real dicks.*

They're *NOT* all nice. They're *NOT* all pure. They do not always have a mage's best interests at heart, and one could, in fact, be pushing its mage toward disaster. The Nephandi are pursuing a valid (if awful) cosmic destiny, and the Mad follow inspirations that are every bit as valid as those of the kindest Celestial Chorister. The forces of madness, stasis, and corruption are parts of **Mage**'s universe, just like the forces of goodness, progress, and imagination. Although you *can*, of course, treat the Avatar as a cosmic chaperone, that's not **Mage**'s default assumption.

Even if an Avatar is "good" in its inclinations, it can still display an awesome cruelty. The Old Gods are not pleasant entities, and the God of the Book revels in slaughter and plague. Angels traditionally kill people if their god wills it so, and animal Avatars often reveal the implacable indifference of Nature personified. In an Avatar's role, you can be harsh, obnoxious, or downright horrific. An Avatar can be a cosmic asshole if that seems appropriate. Don't make the mistake of assuming they're all sweet.

Like other characters, Avatars have goals, tactics, and perhaps even beliefs. For suggestions you can use when playing an Avatar, see the section about ***Characters*** earlier in this chapter, especially the portions about ***Motivations and Tactics***, ***Inhuman Entities***, and ***Relationships***. For two truly detailed treatments of the Avatar and its role in a Seeking, see the **Mage: The Ascension** supplements **The Book of Mirrors** (pps. 53-61) and the **Mage Storyteller's Handbook** (pps. 99-127).

Seekings: Journeys of Insight

The internal journeys known as *Seekings* also depend upon the mage's beliefs, allegiance, and personal Avatar. You can get a lot of ideas about them from the various groups described in **Chapter Five**, the various paradigms and practices detailed in **Chapter Ten**, and the culture of the mage himself. After all, it's a good bet that a Cheyenne Dreamspeaker who practices medicine-craft would experience Seekings as horseback rides and hunts across a limitless Great Plains, possibly in the company of an Avatar who takes the form of Raven, Wind Horse, or White Buffalo Woman.

That said, each Seeking depends upon the individual mage. If that same Cheyenne mage is a Virtual Adept who performs reality-hacking, then his Seeking is more likely to be a run through an impossible digital maze in the company of an anarchistic computer Sim. Hell, he might even dream-journey into his old high school with the boy he had a secret crush on, who now – as the Avatar – forces him to deal with his unresolved gender issues. The details of a Seeking come, ultimately, from the heart and soul of the mage who has it.

Rules of Seeking

For the most part, a Seeking plays out without rules. It's a contest of imagination, not dice. At certain points, you might demand a Willpower roll when the character needs to stand firm or make a hard choice. Beyond that, however, you should avoid chart-checking. There's no Paradox in Seekings, and magick works (or doesn't work) by default. The ultimate results, get determined by the decisions your player makes, not by his dice pools or luck.

Managing a Seeking

Seekings are deliberate events. The player and his mage decide that they want to advance along the Path (that is, buy another dot in Arete), and so you plot out the details of that Seeking and then run a one-person mini-episode. Each mage goes Seeking alone, and the other players sit out – perhaps taking on supporting roles if you want them to do so – until the Seeking ends.

Avatars, Rules, and Reality

When you get past all the mystic doublespeak, Avatars are personifications of capital-R Reality. As such, they're immune to Paradox even when they manifest in forms that other people can see. Most often, however, they don't violate the Consensus in public ways. A given Avatar might look like a flying, irradiated, silver brain when the mage sees it in her mind's eye. If that same Avatar appears to other people, though, it'll probably look like a man with silver hair and an unusually large head – walking, not flying, down the street. An Avatar can fuck with a mage's sense of reality, sure, but it's not likely to fuck with Reality at large because it *is* a little piece of Reality at large. That, at least, is an arbitrary rules decision. If you want Avatars to manifest uncanny forms in public, then feel free to run with your own creative impulse. Your chronicle, your rules.

(For obvious reasons, a Seeking makes for an excellent "solo episode" between regular game sessions. Thanks to the Internet, you can now play out Seekings in chat, Instant Message, Skype, text, or some other virtual format.)

Consistent Elements of a Seeking

Certain Seeking features are universal. As **The Book of Mirrors** points out, all Seekings follow a predictable pattern:

- The mage enters a dream world in which things have symbolic forms.
- That mage encounters fearsome hazards, traps, dilemmas, and obstacles based upon that mage's real-world issues.
- Each major obstacle reflects a chamber through which that mage must pass before he can move forward in his quest for more enlightenment.
- Each chamber features a test. Until he can successfully meet that challenge, he'll keep returning to that chamber and that test.
- Specific elements of each chamber and test change from visit to visit, but they'll all deal with a related obstacle that the mage faces in his external life (fear, grief, egotism, self-righteousness, hesitation, greed, power lust, and so forth).
- Each chamber and test is more difficult than the last, and the Seeker must pass through the previous chambers (and face the previous tests) again before he can reach the next one. And yes, he can fail a test that he has passed before!
- The Avatar serves as both a cheerleader and a taskmaster. The exact amount of cheering or hostility will depend upon the mage, the Avatar, and the relationship between them. (See ***The Mystic Asshole***, above.)
- Failure dumps the mage back into the waking world, often in physical and existential pain. No Arete for him this time!
- Success triggers an Epiphany: a sudden rush of bliss and understanding. The mage awakens with another dot in his Arete Trait and a deepened appreciation of his place within Creation.

Remember that these tests are supposed to be frightening and hard to pass. Creation is not handing out Enlightenment merit badges, and the keys to Reality are not obtained without a struggle. Low-Arete Seekings will be relatively easy, but the higher-level ones (Arete 5 and higher) are harrowing things. A mage will fail such Seekings many times before he succeeds. There are reasons that Mastery can take lifetimes to achieve. If it was easy, then *everyone* could do magick!

Are Seekings difficult because mages *believe* that they'll be difficult? Good question. For whatever reason, a mage is his own worst enemy in a Seeking. If you play up that aspect of the quest, your chronicle will be thematically richer for having done so.

Six Steps to a More Enlightened You

Whatever the specifics of a Seeking might be, you can plan out a Seeking using the following six steps:

- **Initiation:** Entering a trance (often through meditation or dreaming), the mage passes into the landscape where he'll be tested. For all practical purposes, the landscape is internal, although metaphysicians could argue that it exists out there in the Maya too.

- **Impediment:** That mage encounters the traps, chambers, and challenges described above. Although one major impediment blocks him at each chamber, smaller traps and puzzles might delay him between chambers.

- **Trials:** Here's where he needs to face his demons, typically without the use of magick. In game terms, these trials come through in roleplaying and narration, not as dice-rolling contests – see ***Rules of Seekings***, above.

- **Choice:** At least once for each chamber, the mage must make a hard choice between deeply desirable (or deeply *undesirable*) options. You know which choice is correct; your player, obviously, does not. The outcome of that choice is always an either/ or situation, which leads him to...

- **Acceptance or Denial:** *Denial* means that the mage isn't ready just yet. Having made the wrong choice, he falls back into his material body – usually suffering from headaches, depression, other ailments, and possibly a loss of Willpower. (At the higher levels, a failed Seeking *always* costs one or two points of temporary Willpower.) A really bad failure during a high-level Seeking may even drop the mage into ***Quiet*** (see Chapter Ten, pp. 554-561), or reveal one of those ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** (Chapter Nine, (p. 407).

  Acceptance reflects the right choice. Flooded with bliss and wisdom, he awakens back in his body with a renewed sense of confidence (one temporary point of Willpower or the restoration of all Willpower he had lost before that point) and the new dot of Arete.

- **Closure or Failure:** As mentioned in the previous step, success or failure during a Seeking has long-term effects. After the mage returns from his journey, the things he has faced and endured haunt him... possibly as lingering doubts or as a shining sense of triumph over incredible, self-imposed odds.

The Seeking's Goal

A Seeking's features and goals always depend upon the mage's Path. An Akashic mage will strive to disassociate himself from mortal delusions, a Bata'a mage will Seek for greater unity with the Loa, and a Nephandus will embrace deeper levels of corruption and deceit. *Seekings are not about being "good" or "virtuous" by conventional morality standards*. If a given mage pursues a Path of selfishness and greed, then the obstacles she faces would involve compassion and doubt, not selfishness or greed.

The vast differences between a Seeking's goals and mages' diverse ideas of what Ascension should be provide fuel for the many disagreements mages face. No matter how much a given belief might insist otherwise, **Mage** assumes that all answers have some validity. The Tellurian is composed of *all* things, from diamonds to shit. Although it could be said that ultimate wisdom involves piercing the veil of illusions around material existence, a Seeking brings each mage closer to personal transcendence, not a single moral state.

Arete: Expanding Awareness

As a mage's Arete Trait rises, that person's view of the world expands. Early on, the mage is beginning to get clues to the deeper levels of the universe; further along the Path, ze starts to see zir place in that bigger picture. Assuming that the mage continues to grow in excellence, zir perceptions will continue growing as well. That mage will see patterns where most folks see empty space and strengthen zir grasp upon answers in situations in which the average person doesn't even realize ze could ask a question. In game terms, that person is learning how to rework reality. So how, as a Storyteller, can you reveal that sense of recognition in story terms?

First off, go back to the sections in this chapter that deal with ***Atmosphere and Description*** and ***The Deeper Level***. As your chronicle goes on, incorporate more vivid descriptions and more significant symbols. Instead of explaining what those symbols mean or giving obvious descriptions, make your descriptions more poetic and mysterious and then *let your players figure out what those symbols and descriptions mean*. That way, you reflect the ways in which a mage sees things more deeply and recognizes the symbols all around zir. At the same time, you also subtly invite your *players* to look deeper too – to use their imaginations and find significance throughout the chronicle. This way, all parties contribute to the enigmatic atmosphere of your chronicle. You don't have to do everything yourself, your players add their own creativity to the mix, and **Mage** grows richer and more mysterious as its characters expand their awareness of its world.

Ascension: Can There be Only One?

Okay, you might ask, how can a character Ascend? When Ascension is literally the name of the game, what can you do in order to bring that concept into your chronicle?

Ze? Zir?

Words, like gender, are dynamic, not static. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, *ze* and *zir* are gender-neutral pronoun alternates to *they/ their*. Generally used in socially progressive circles, these pronouns respect an all-encompassing view of gender, as opposed to the gender polarities of *his* and *her*. Because they're still new terms, these pronouns seem unusual. Some folks consider them to be punchlines, and others *insist* upon using them. In a game dedicated to inclusiveness and change, it's cool to see how language and the concepts behind it are changing too. So despite the contested nature of these pronouns, we choose to use them to show how language, like reality, can change in small yet significant ways.

As **The Book of Mirrors** points out (pps. 60-61), Ascension is not hitting Arete 10 or maxing out all your Spheres. It's not about power but about *the transcendence of the need for power*. Mere power, in **Mage**, is a trap. The more a mage pursues it, the further she gets from ultimate Ascension. Even if her Path is all *about* power (see the ***Might is Right*** paradigm in **Chapter Ten**), that person must still grow beyond the *need* to acquire power. And if that sounds paradoxical, you're right. There are reasons that Ascension is easy to talk about but difficult to achieve.

Personal Ascension

Individual Ascension depends upon the beliefs and Path of each character. For one mage, it could mean sacrificing himself for the greater good, whereas another mage wants to transcend mortal illusions and become one with the energy of the All. At the climax of Darren Aronofsky's brilliant, if puzzling, film *The Fountain*, the apparently immortal protagonist achieves Ascension through orgasmic cosmic unity... an Ascension his wife reaches far earlier than he does. *Jacob's Ladder* provides a quieter form of Ascension when its hero accepts things he has hidden from himself. It could even be said that the heroine of the French horror movie *Martyrs* (which is *exceedingly* strong stuff, and not a film recommended for most viewers!) reaches Ascension through atrocity, although it's an extremely bleak form of transcendence. Jesus achieves it. Buddha achieves it. Many who seek it, though, do not... and those who *do* reach Ascension do not return, except perhaps as ephemeral manifestations of inspirational guidance. A person who Ascends does not become a super-mage. At best, she manifests as soft voices or a vision in the trees, holding out a vision of something beyond the scope of human consciousness. From a Storyteller's perspective, then, Ascension is the end of a character's Path, winding into places no mortal can truly understand.

Just Below Transcendence

One step below full Ascension waits the realm of the bodhisattvas: those people who reach the brink of Ascension but then step back and stick around to help other people reach that destination too. Although such people often display incredible gifts (and may, in certain cases, be incredibly powerful if their Path demands raw power), this stage is *not* Archmagery. Archmages pursue power and knowledge but typically fail to transcend that quest... indeed, they usually trap themselves that way. A bodhisattva, on the other hand, typically epitomizes the ideals of his Path, often beneath a perfectly normal exterior.

In game terms, a bodhisattva-type character appears to be a typical mage of his or her sect, albeit one who radiates an aura of sublime accomplishment along that Path. An Etherite would be formidably competent, and an Ecstatic would shimmer with incandescent sensuality. Technocrats and Disparate mages can reach this level too, though they rarely use this name for that achievement. (Actually, a bodhisattva almost never claims that title. Anyone who calls herself a bodhisattva *isn't* one.) And yeah, the Fallen and the Mad can be bodhisattvas too – and such mages are among the most fearsome entities alive.

As a Tibetan Buddhist could point out, bodhisattvas are not necessarily serene, peaceful sages. There are bodhisattvas of war, pain, lust, and plague. Whatever her Path might be, the bodhisattva epitomizes its ideals. Essentially, that person has reached the peak of Ascension, but she decided to hover there in a state of near-perfection, sharing wisdom and enlightenment with people who seem worthy of her attention. Game-wise, that character has had a chance at personal Ascension but refused to embrace it until she's had a chance to lead others down her Path as well. This character isn't necessarily more powerful than she was before; a fundamental element of her personality, though, has changed. She lives and breathes her Path and represents it as she moves throughout her world.

Global Ascension

As for the idea that one faction will bring all the world to a state of global Ascension, it's generally considered more of an ideal than a reality. People, creeds, and nations have sought such goals throughout human history, and yet we're as far from that state now as ever. We're evolving, no question... but into *what*, exactly? Despite suburban folklore about Indigo Children and Ascended Masters leading humanity into a glorious New Age, 30 seconds spent online shows that we're pretty far from such ideals. Is Ascension, then, impossible? That, dear Storyteller, is *your* decision.

The sourcebook **Ascension** provides a number of potential scenarios in which some climactic endgame resolves the fallen state of mankind. Obviously, that book's not canon in **Mage 20** (if it were, there'd *be* no **Mage 20**!), but you could draw some ideas from it if and when you want to bring global Ascension into play. Even better, create your own idea of what global Ascension means, and then guide your chronicle toward that goal. On a less Apocalyptic level, your players could shift the balance of belief and acceptance among the Sleepers, changing the state of their world even if they're not capping off the End of History in the process.

Ultimately, **Mage** is not about *accomplishing* Ascension but about *pursuing* it. That's why one assertion of the **Mage Revised** years – that Ascension has been lost – is incorrect. **Mage** is about *transcendence*, not survival or triumph in some cosmic win/lose game. As long as humanity exists in its current flawed state, Ascension remains possible. It might not look the way you expect it to look... hell, it's often just the opposite. But for *any* mage of *any* faction, some level of transcendence can be found.

Running With Magick

Ah, magick – the core of **Mage**. Most RPGs feature lists of prescribed magical spells with damage, duration, and so forth regulated by levels or power points. That's not how magic (no k) actually works, however, in the real-life applications of the Arts. Both the real-life mystic practices involved with magic and the literary form of fictional magic show magic as *an extension of the person who uses it*. There are spells, true, but they're guided by intention; certain times, objects, places, and practices support magical phenomena, but unless they operate under their own power – like the Nodes and Talismans described throughout this book – the person using them must know what he's doing in order to employ their powers. And so, although **Mage** is *not* some occult teaching tool, its approach to magic(k) as an extension of the magick-user is true to both life and fiction.

And, like "real" magick, that can be challenging to deal with at times.

One of the reasons we invoke the "pretentious 'k'" at the end of the term *magick* is because we want to drive home the difference between static tricks and dynamic extensions of the mage. As **Chapters Two**, **Six**, and **Ten** make clear, a mage's Arts and Sciences come from that mage's expertise and excellence. More than goal-oriented combat maneuvers, **Mage**'s magickal workings both project and reflect the person who employs them. From a Storyteller's standpoint, that often means that you decide the potential and results of a player's magickal activities based upon the situation, not upon a set of clearly defined specifics. And that can be a pain in the ass, because those situations change not only from chronicle to chronicle but also from player and session to player and session. So what, then, do you do in order to run magick without tearing out your own hair?

The Simple Method

You could, if you want, simply run magick off of the ***Common Magickal Effects chart*** in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 508-510). On that chart, you look up what the mage wants to accomplish, check the necessary Spheres, and then have the player roll his Arete Trait to see how much effect that spell has when cast. This method's probably the best one to use if you're not an experienced Storyteller, and although it limits flexibility, this simple method makes it easy to run **Mage**'s Sphere-based magick.

The Character Method

The standard method for running **Mage** magick involves asking a player, "*What's your character doing, and how is she doing it?*"

If she responds with something like, "*I'm using Forces 3/Prime 2 to inflict aggravated damage*," ask her, "*But what is YOUR CHARACTER doing in order to make that happen?*" This way, you invite the player to think in terms of the mage and her practices rather than in terms of the game systems involved.

Once you've figured out how the character is weaving belief, Will, and knowledge into a magickal Effect, *then* check **Chapter Ten** for the rules involved. This way, you put story first and let it guide the rules and their results. Check out the nearby ***Example of Play*** to see how this sort of thing plays out in action, and although you shouldn't let players succeed *too* easily *too* often, reward good roleplaying and imaginative descriptions with success whenever it seems reasonable to do so.

What? A Coincidence?

The answer to that question will also help you decide one of the thornier aspects of **Mage**'s flexible magick system: whether or not a given Effect is coincidental or vulgar. As **Chapter Ten** explains, magick is easier and safer to perform when its effects (and Effects) fit into what people accept as possibility. Showy, obvious magick is vulgar, smacked down by the High Court of Reality Itself. Where, then, are the boundaries between coincidence and vulgar magick?

Chapter Ten deals with that subject in great detail (as shown below), so it's not important right now. The vital thing, from a Storyteller's perspective, is that you make a decision and stick with it. The ***Questioning Coincidence*** sidebar will help in that regard. If most of the answers to those questions are *Yes*, then the spell probably fits the definition of coincidental magick. If not, then it's most likely vulgar.

Enforcing Your Decision

Ultimately, that decision belongs to you, the Storyteller. In **Chapter Ten**, you can find a section that explores the boundaries of potential. Check out ***Coincidental Magick vs. Vulgar Magick***, (pp. 530-534), particularly the ***Axis of Coincidence*** section. Most of the questions and debates about that subject are addressed right there. Meanwhile, the ***Reality Zones*** section, (pp. 611-617), deals with the kind of wiggle room your players might find in different places around the world.

In the end, however, *you are the goddamned Storyteller*. If you say, "*No, that's vulgar*," then it's vulgar, *period*. End of discussion. A certain amount of debate is essential within creative collaboration. If, however, you're having endless arguments about some technomancer's ability to teleport fireballs from out of the Sun "because it's in my paradigm," then feel free to lay down the law as you see fit.

Enforcing Focus

Ultimately, in **Mage**, magick *does* flow from the mage. The ways in which a mage makes things happen, however, depend upon his focus: that combination of belief, practice, and instruments that we've talked about so much in other chapters. We emphasize

Questioning Coincidence

For those times when you're not sure whether a given spell – in game terms, an *Effect* – is coincidental or vulgar, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Obviousness:** Is the mage's spell essentially invisible, or can people sense it without using some sort of specialized perceptions?
- **Paradigm:** Is the mage using a type of magick that's appropriate for that mage and focus? For example, a martial artist catching arrows or healing herself through intense discipline fits that mage and focus; the same mage using a laptop to infect a person with rabies would not fit her at all.
- **Possibility**: Do the spell, focus, and results fit into the local reality zone? That is, would normal people in that place expect this sort of thing to be possible? A cyborg firing rockets from his arm in New York City might seem possible, but a shaman turning into a wolf would not. In the primal wilderness of Romania, however, the reverse could be true.
- **Practice:** Is the mage using his usual practice in the usual way (a martial artist using kung fu, a cyborg using rockets), as opposed to making shit up on the fly (either mage using mind power to make trees fall down)?
- **Resources:** Is the mage working with things that are already present (summoning a taxi that's just down the street), as opposed to conjuring up things that had not existed there before (making a cab and driver out of thin air)?
- **Upheaval:** Does the spell take the subtle form of least resistance, like a falling cinderblock, as opposed to causing massive changes of state and form (turning someone into soap bubbles), and/ or violating obvious physical laws (disintegrating a house)?
- **Drama:** Does the spell make dramatic sense within your story (an angry martial artist kicking a tree down), as opposed to seeming absurd (that same martial artist kicking the moon out of orbit)?

You don't need to answer every question each time somebody casts a spell. In most cases, the answers will be obvious. If you need a tie-breaker, though, err on the side of drama. **Mage** *is*, after all, a storytelling game about magick. Whenever possible, let it be magical.

this point throughout this book because it's so easily forgotten: *the mage does what he does because he believes he can do it when he puts those beliefs into practice*. As a Storyteller, then, enforce that point by enforcing each character's focus; by doing so, you favor *story* over *rules* and also keep those rules from being easily abused.

In previous editions of **Mage**, the term *focus* applied to the tools that a mage used when casting Effects. As he gained Arete, a mage could abandon his foci and work magick through Arete alone. In **Mage 20**, however, *focus* refers to the entire act of focusing Arete through belief, activity, and tools. The mage can grow beyond the need for tools, but he still needs to believe in what he's doing in order to make things happen.

That's a really important distinction, because focus gives both the players and the Storyteller something to hold on to when using the flexible rules of **Mage**'s magick system. The player can say, "*I can do such-and-such because my character believes he can do it*," and the Storyteller gets to say, "*You can't do such-and-such because it doesn't fit your character's focus*." This, in turn, gives a player permission to be creative while also giving the Storyteller the ability to say, "*No, you can't just make up stuff that doesn't fit your character*." Jinx can use her bond with the city and her goddess in order to make weird things happen; she can't simply do whatever the player wants her to do once she has enough dice to have a decent chance at succeeding. Again, the story and the character drive the rules.

Jacob's Focus

In the movie *Ink* – which, incidentally, is a film every **Mage** player should see – the Pathfinder Jacob manipulates a series of events in order to stage a car accident. He doesn't simply say, "*Hey, I'm a mage, so I Will that car to crash*." Instead, he literally orchestrates people and elements to collide in a way that fits his focus.

Jacob, as *Ink* reveals, is a story-teller, so his focus plays out a drama of coincidences, set to a chant of "*One-two-three-four, One-two-three-four...*" In game terms, Jacob employs Entropy 2 and Forces 2 to move things without touching them, possibly augmented with Time 2 so that they all fall together in a coordinated pattern in time to cause the car crash. It's a sublime moment of movie magic that also perfectly suits the style of freeform magick of **Mage: The Ascension**. If you want to see what enforcing a focus looks like, this scene (also available, as of this writing, on YouTube) presents a perfect example of belief, practice, and instruments in motion.

Within this book, **Chapter Two** reveals the importance of belief, **Chapter Six** ties focus into character creation (see p. 256), and **Chapter Ten** presents an extensive collection of paradigms, practices, and instruments in the section called ***Focus and the Arts***. As the Storyteller, make sure that your players keep these things in mind as their characters cast Effects. Doing so will eliminate a lot of the ambiguity and rules-abuse so often associated with **Mage**.

Chapter Six also includes an extra carrot to go with this particular stick: bonus experience points that can be given to players who really explore the roleplaying possibilities of their characters' focus. This way, you may reward collaborators who go the extra distance and bring the details of their characters into the game. **(See *Experience Points* pp. 335-336).**

Example of Play: Jinxing the Cops

"So Camille – what is Jinx doing to make sure that the cops don't find her?"

"Well, I'm using Entropy 2 in order to..."

"No, what is JINX doing?"

"Oops, sorry. Jinx takes out her knife and concentrates on a sort of chaos-maze design. Whispering a prayer to Risk, she scratches that design into the brick, being really quiet so that the cops don't hear her."

"Good. Make a Dexterity + Stealth roll, difficulty 7, just to make sure you're not heard."

"Okay. Three successes."

"Cool. So now, what are you doing in game terms?"

"Entropy 2 to scramble the odds of being noticed in MY favor, not theirs. That's subtle and invisible – no one could reasonably connect a kid carving graffiti into the wall to the cops who are passing her by."

"So, coincidental, then. Okay, good call. Let's see... Sphere Rank 2, plus 3 for being coincidental, so difficulty 5. Roll your Arete."

"One success."

"And you made your Stealth roll, too. It doesn't seem like they notice you. Jinx feels a rush of breeze past her skin, as if the Goddess Risk approves of what you're doing. Out of the corner of your eye, you see Talon tipping her hat to you. The cops pass by, their voices fading in the night. Well done. NOW what do you do...?"

Paradox: The Hammer of Reality

Every once in a while, you still need to bring the hammer down. And although **Chapter Ten**'s sections about ***Paradox*** and ***Quiet*** **(pp. 547-553)** and **(pp. 555-561)** deal with that subject, it's worth some brief attention in this chapter too.

Paradox is not a monster that you sic on your players. Although Paradox *Spirits* can be monsters, the forces of Paradox represent the forces of Reality. Mages push against Reality, and sometimes Reality pushes back. If you make that pushback suit the push that inspired it, then your Paradox backlashes will seem fair instead of arbitrary.

Going With Reality's Flow

In general, Paradox takes the path of least resistance. A seer who employs Time magick to look into the future is more likely to be struck blind (a Paradox Flaw) than be hit by a sudden storm of exploding energy (a physical backlash) or visited by Wrinkle (a Paradox Spirit), if only because that Flaw disrupts Reality less than an explosion or a weird old man who turns back time.

Mages who stir up a lot of Paradox, however, become walking reality-warps. And so, when Reality finally *does* push back, it pushes back hard. *That's* when the Storyteller brings out the war hammer and belts the mage upside her skull. Truly weird manifestations of Paradox kick in only when a mage has been doing really weird stuff. Again, the pushback suits the push. If a player stirs things up a little bit, send her some ripples of Paradox. And if she throws a big rock into the reality pool, figuratively speaking, let Reality dunk her in return.

Resonance

Those ripples of Paradox often manifest as Resonance, the metaphysical echoes of a mage's deeds. From a Storyteller's perspective, these energies influence the mage and her surroundings – often in subtle ways, occasionally in really strange ones.

Generally, you'll want to play up the *story effects* of Resonance rather than tracking points and assigning names to each little quirk of magickal behavior. Although some of the later **Mage** sourcebooks featured a complex (and often contradictory) system of Resonance types, it's far simpler and more evocative to describe the uncanny atmosphere surrounding the characters. See ***The Deeper Levels***, earlier in this chapter, for suggestions about how you can emphasize those ripples of Resonance, and check out the section called ***Resonance and Synergy*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 560-561) for details about the ways in which **Mage 20** Resonance can appear in your chronicle.

Poetic Justice

When Storytelling the effects of Paradox, use a strong sense of *poetic justice*: the principle that someone gets what he deserves. A haughty wizard will be humiliated by Paradox; a rigid Black Suit will be made more rigid, or else rendered "loose" by his own standards. Mad scientists tend to get blown up by their creations, and curse-happy witches often suffer curses in return. In the words of Gilbert and Sullivan, let the punishment suit the crime. That way, Paradox is an intimately personal clue-bat you bop your players with when necessary... or, to quote Xerox the Orphan, it's "Jiminy Cricket with a chainsaw" when mages and players get too naughty to endure.

Types of Chronicle

Magick wears many faces, and the Awakened can explore many chronicles. Although the traditional approach of Council mages battling an implacable Technocracy provides **Mage's** default setting, you can actually run any sort of chronicle you wish. Especially with **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition**, your options expand across a wide range of possibilities. What sort of chronicles might you explore within your troupe? That depends upon what you want to do with **Mage**.

What Unites Your Characters?

As we saw in the ***Common Ground*** section earlier in this chapter, your range of options comes down to one necessary element: *a compelling reason to work together*. Without a shared bond, no group of mages will collaborate for long. An important motivation, on the other hand, can force a Black Suit, an Ecstatic, a reality-hacker, a shamanic trickster, an underworld enforcer, two street punks, and a high-class physician to cooperate. They probably won't like each other very much, but that antipathy will take a backseat to survival if the threat uniting them seems severe enough.

From the Storyteller's perspective, then, your chronicle demands a shared cause: threats, friends, allegiance, aspirations, projects – something as simple as a neighborhood in peril, or as esoteric as a cosmic puzzle for which every mage involved seeks an answer. The following suggestions point your creativity in certain directions, but each one requires common cause. That foundation, as mentioned earlier, makes your saga a *chronicle* rather than a series of random adventures with a bunch of mages who've got no reason to stick together.

The Traditions Chronicle

The visionary throwbacks of the embattled Council of Nine embody the word *mage*. Indeed, when **Mage** first appeared, every chronicle revolved around their struggles with the Technocracy and other factions. Later, **Mage Revised** focused on the ragged survivors of a shattered Council. And although it's true that the Technocracy and other factions present some interesting options, most players relate most easily with these rebels against an oppressive, banal future.

In a Traditions-based chronicle, each mage belongs to one of the nine groups devoted to the Council. Depending upon your preferences (see the nearby sidebar ***That Damned Elusive Metaplot***), they might be living on the edge, ensconced in powerful Horizon Realms, adopting new technologies into their practices, ruling the Digital Web, clinging to a fading Mythic Age idea, claiming an enchanted future, or otherwise pursuing the ancient ideals and novel revolutions that make them such a colorful crew.

Features, Elements, and Themes

Generally, Council-based chronicles feature a loosely organized cabal of young mages working toward a common ideal. Rivalries between Traditions come through in personality clashes between dissimilar allies: the eccentric Etherite, the grim Euthanatos, the long-suffering Dreamspeaker, and so on. For extra spice, however, you could suggest that your players run

Genres

Stories often fall into types, or *genres*. And although we don't have enough space to detail too many genres here, some of them are worth mentioning as possibilities for your **Mage** chronicle:

- **Action/ Adventure:** Gunfights, explosions, and edge-of-your-fingernails stunts typify the action/ adventure genre. Collateral damage comes with the territory. These high-octane tales involve elaborate violence and hair-trigger suspense. **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventure** deals specifically with such stories, and any mage who can stand the damage can play.
- **Comedy/ Satire: Mage** is satirical by default. Even so, the comedy/ satire genre takes awful subjects – humiliation, betrayal, disaster, even death – and accelerates them to the point of absurdity. That balance, though, is very hard to get right, and so comedy often becomes goofiness instead. Silly **Mage** adventures should be avoided on the whole, although silly *moments* – like the stern Technocrat tripping over his own trench coat – can lighten up a serious scene. On the whole, comedy works best when it jabs at our flawed humanity and reveals the absurdity of existence while getting us to laugh with, and at, ourselves.
- **High Fantasy:** The realm of dragons and lightning bolts, high fantasy indulges our heroic impulses. Mighty magicks dominate such stories, in which epic plots rage across exotic locations. Paradox limits such things in the modern world, but a historical chronicle (like **Dark Ages Mage** or **The Sorcerers Crusade**), or one set in the Otherworlds, can set your inner Tolkien free.
- **Horror:** A pervasive atmosphere of dread defines the horror genre, which is less about vampires or haunted houses than about the spectre of mortality. The word *horror* means "to ripple with disgust," and this genre confronts things that appall us. Key to that kind of fear is a sense of helplessness. In order to do horror well in **Mage**, then, the Awakened must confront some threat their powers cannot easily resolve.
- **Occult:** A natural realm for mages, the occult genre focuses on dangerous secrets hidden in musty corners of an ignorant world. Subtlety is essential, for those mysteries could wreak havoc if they came to light. Madness, too, is a vital element of occult genre stories, and threats to mind and soul outweigh mere physical harm.
- **Romance:** Mages are not immune to passion; some, in fact, pursue it. The romance genre – which is more about *passion* than about *love* – suits certain mages perfectly. Named for the artists who embraced emotion over rationality, romance features complex entanglements, inexorable passions, divided loyalties, and irrational bonds that do not always end well for anyone concerned.
- **Urban Fantasy:** Couched in the shadows of our modern world, urban fantasy stories feature hidden magicks, wondrous revelations, and threats to mysteries that few people ever recognize. Often darker and more adult than high fantasy, this genre blends mystic elements with real-life concerns: rape, drugs, abuse, addiction, street life, sexuality, and marginalized cultures on the fringes of an age that has passed them by. Essentially, **Mage** *is* an urban fantasy; still, the genre's focus on disenfranchised people in cityscape environments speaks more to the orphan-style chronicle than to sleek action or classic fantasy.

mages who transcend the usual stereotypes of their Traditions: an Akashic hedonist, a playful death mage, an irreverent Chorister, and other divergent character concepts. That option averts the dreaded Stereotypical **Mage** Game Syndrome, in which shopworn '90s archetypes go through the motions of a quarreling pack of eccentrics whose doomed quest for a new Mythic Age plants them straight in Technocratic crosshairs. That in itself can present a refreshing change from the usual expectations!

As **Chapter Five** shows, even the oldest dogs learn new tricks eventually. Despite their emphasis upon tradition, the Nine have adopted to the shifting ground of a 21st-century Consensus. Faith, after all, is back in style, and the dull gray vision of old-school Technocrats is further away than ever. In this crazy, colorful age, the Council's rebels have a major edge over greybeards of all descriptions.

The wild potential of technology and the popularity of steampunk and reality-hacking demonstrate the vitality of Virtual Adept and Etherite ideals, and the growing global festival culture and ethnic restoration pride movements unite the Ecstatics, Speakers, and Verbenae in ways they've never enjoyed before. Contrasted against the grubby throwbacks and wretched survivors of earlier **Mage** editions, your 21st-century Tradition chronicle could spotlight a surging age of mystic wonder. On the flip side, of course, you could run a gritty survival drama in which such wonder fades beneath the tide of Sleeper apathy and Nephandic corruption. Either way, the Traditions are *anything* but dull!

Most **Mage** sourcebooks feature a Tradition-based worldview. As a result, there's lots of material to work with for this type of game. Your Council might or might not have been crippled by the Avatar Storm and its related disasters, and although most of the **Mage** sourcebooks from 1999 onward assume that it *has* been, you can run with alternative ideas if you wish. Perhaps the Traditions have recovered from those setbacks within the last 10 years. Maybe those setbacks never happened to begin with. The catastrophes of the late 1990s could have forced the Council to dump their bullshit and focus their energies on a new and vital vision that has

since taken the Traditions to the top of the Ascension War. The Council could even have been infiltrated by Nephandic influence, driving your heroes to confront a collection of wizards whose ideals have become toxic to everything they hold dear. **Chapter Five** contains material for each possibility, and your players don't necessarily have to know which option you've chosen to employ!

Regardless of the metaplot, Tradition-based chronicles often feature themes like *Loyalty*, *Wonder*, *Isolation*, *Vengeance*, *Defiance*, *Decay*, *Freedom*, *Rebellion*, and *Rebirth*. Depending on the current state of the Council, the mood for such chronicles could be dreary, playful, furious, chaotic, deeply fantastic, paranoid, or other collisions of faith and desperation. Tradition mages might be bound to follow orders; even then, however, such characters have more leeway than their Technocratic rivals – a freedom that reflects the greatest ideals of magick.

The Technocratic Chronicle

In a world filled with crazy wizards, vampiric schemers, furry killing machines, and other atrocities of nature, someone has to make the hard calls. As a result, the Technocratic Union faces off against demonic hordes on behalf of the Masses, channeling Enlightened Science toward the advancement of all humanity. It's a tough and often underappreciated job for which these guardians of progress get unfairly slandered by their superstitionist rivals. True, the human omelet requires a lot of shattered eggs. If Joe and Jane Average can get through the day without suffering paranormal depredations, though, all the sacrifices will be worthwhile.

To the traditional perspective, the Technocracy represents implacable tyranny. In a Technocratic chronicle, however, the illusion of a soulless monolith fractures into thousands of hardworking agents of order in a demented World of Darkness. Especially in the new millennium, the Technocratic vision looks a lot less ominous from the inside. Old-school steelheads still act like rejects from *1984*, true enough, but the majority of the Union's personnel have fascinating – and deeply *human* – stories to tell.

A Technocratic chronicle flips the usual **Mage** perspective around. Here, the Traditions represent dangerous threats to human progress, to be converted when possible and eliminated when need be. Bloody witches, sick occultists, perverse scientists, and anarchistic weirdoes keep the Technocrats busy, and occasional threats from hairy monsters and demonic predators demand maximum firepower. Beyond the battle lines, Technocratic heroes rally the Masses, explore the bounds of hypertech, and craft a Consensus in which Reality Deviants become obsolete. Behind those "Black Hats and Mirrorshades," dedicated people strive against the forces of ignorant terror, bringing Enlightenment to all... by whatever means necessary.

Features, Elements, and Themes

Lest this kinder, gentler Union seem soft, remember that *Control* is more than an abstract ideal for the Technocracy.

That Damned Elusive Metaplot

As shown throughout the many ***Future Fates*** sidebars throughout this book, **Mage**'s metaplot is not set in steel. You could have Archmasters flying through the Otherworlds, a mighty Council couched in secure Horizon Realms, or an Umbra that's never seen an Avatar Storm. If you want to tell apocalyptic tales, of course, you could still have soul-shredding fragments riding the borders between worlds while young heroes salvage whatever they can grab in between Paradox blasts and power-armored foes. As the Storyteller, *you* get to decide how and where "that damned elusive metaplot" impacts upon your chronicle. Think of this as "Schrödinger's **Mage**," wherein the metaplot is both alive and dead until you decide to open the box.

Even the most sympathetic Technocratic chronicle features backstabbing politics, oppressive authority, constant paranoia, and shiny ultraviolence. In theory and practice, the Technocracy is a machine. The fact that the machine isn't necessarily *evil* doesn't make it a hearts-and-flowers dispenser.

And yet, that stylish gloss of hypertech adventure makes Technocracy chronicles shine. Tradition mages might be Gandalf, but Technocrats are James Bond, Tony Stark, Nick Fury, and La Femme Nikita rolled into one. Agents of the Union have all the best toys, vast resources, and the finest backup money can buy. While wizards and witches mumble around in their muddy fortresses, loyal Technocrats enjoy fast cars, sweet perks, and a key to the executive suite.

A Technocratic chronicle reflects the ambivalent attitude we have about technology and control. As citizens of a wired world, we love our toys and fight to keep them... even when that fight leaves innocent people dead. Those toys might be corrupting us, especially in a Nephandic-infiltration chronicle, but that doesn't make technology evil on its own terms. As opposed to the "science is evil" tone of **Mage 1st Edition**, a Technocratic chronicle revels in the trappings of progress even as it reflects their bitter cost.

Guide to the Technocracy is the essential sourcebook for a Technocratic chronicle. The five **Revised**-edition Convention books present an updated and exciting vision of the Technocracy, especially in comparison to the dated paranoia of the 1st-edition **Technocracy: Progenitors**, **Iteration X,** and **New World Order** sourcebooks. The 2nd-edition-era **Syndicate** and **Void Engineers** books present a more balanced (though still ominous) Union on the edge of corruption, and **The Book of Mirrors**, **The Technomancer's Toybox**, and **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures** balance their approach between Tradition and Technocratic perspectives. The level of violence in such a chronicle will depend upon whether or not the Pogrom is still in force. Even if the outright war against other factions has cooled down, however, the threats of Nephandic infiltration, Threat Null, demented Marauders, and the Dimensional Anomaly (all covered in **Chapter Five**) are sure to keep your heroes occupied.

With the exception of Project Invictus or Friends of Courage chronicles, each Technocracy-focused story features a team of agents working under enforced protocols. Everyone has a place and purpose within that team. The anarchistic looseness of Tradition cabals is intolerable within this faction, and operatives who resist top-down control will be dealt with harshly. Bound to a greater Union, these Technocratic heroes deal with themes like *Order*, *Vigilance*, *Endurance*, *Greed*, *Corruption*, *Cooperation*, *Ruthlessness*, *Honor*, *Paranoia*, and, of course, *Control*. Moods within such chronicles range from gleaming idealism to oppressive tyranny and blood-soaked carnage. Front-lines adventures, of course, would feature more excitement, but the high stakes of executive capers or deep-cover espionage hold their own glamorous allure.

The Disparate Chronicle

Magick is not defined by war, nor truly even by Ascension. For people throughout time, the Arts have met other needs: food, shelter, comfort, artistry, love... The so-called Crafts were shaped by human needs and cultures. By definition, these Disparates refused to take sides in someone else's war, or else took sides once and then dropped out of the fight. Even so, that Ascension War did not leave them in peace. Now, they gather for their mutual protection, just as the Traditions and Conventions did long ago. Does that mean that the Disparate Alliance plans to join the War? Perhaps a Disparate chronicle could answer that question.

The radically diverse nature of the Disparate sects makes this Alliance a tricky proposition. Because so many of them follow very specific religious creeds, cooperation becomes even more precarious than it is among the more tolerant Traditions. Although most of those sects go back for centuries, even millennia, collaboration is a *very* new thing for them. Characters involved in a Disparate chronicle will be testing freshly built bridges and seeing just how much weight the bridges can stand before they collapse.

Each group has a proud heritage and traditions all its own. You could run a chronicle composed of members from a single group – a Bata'a chronicle, for instance – or from members of several close Allies, like the Solificati and Hollow Ones. A mixed group of Allies could test the bonds of cooperation between groups, or a tight-knit pack of Allies might stand for unity in the face of pressure. In each case, however, the cultures of each Craft will play a significant role in a Disparate chronicle. A Kopa Loei kahuna might be a laid-back surfer boy in many respects, but his reverence for the ancient ways is what makes him what he is.

Features, Elements, and Themes

From a Storyteller perspective, a Disparate chronicle lets you take **Mage**'s metaplot in radical directions. You might ignore it completely because the Crafts refuse to play along, or show it from an unexpected side. Perhaps the Hollow Ones really *did* betray Horizon... or the Traditions at least *believe* that they did. That would pit the Alliance (or certain segments of it, at least) against the combined fury of the Council of Nine – a group that fought the Technocracy to a draw for half a millennium. Or maybe the Technocracy really *is* run by the Nephandi, and the Disparates know that secret. You could arrange things so that both the Traditions *and* Technocracy want to stamp out Disparate survivors, in which case the battle for survival becomes more intense than ever. If the Union had wiped out every Craft mage it could find, then the Alliance would want revenge, even if that meant pulling the entire world apart to get it.

Maybe the entire Ascension War is one big Nephandic endgame, with the Alliance as the only uncorrupted faction. Or the Alliance itself is a patsy for some group or other – the Hollow Ones, the Wu Lung, the Nephandi, perhaps even the Mad – and the characters realize this ugly secret at a critical time for everyone concerned. Divided loyalties and secret agendas and the very real need to keep the Alliance under wraps could make a Technocracy chronicle seem safe and open by comparison!

Mage 20 assumes that the Alliance *is* a secret, at least for the present time. Every Ally has a compelling reason to play its cards *very* close to the chest, especially if the Hollow treachery or Nephandic infiltration metaplots are part of your chronicle. Therefore, a Disparate chronicle would feature themes like *Secrecy*, *Survival*, *Endurance*, *Betrayal*, *Manipulation*, *Revenge*, *Restoration*, *Pride*, *Protection*, *Suspicion*, *Uneasy Allies*, *Religious Zeal*, and other prickly ideas. The mood can veer between heady novelty and oppressive fear, with undercurrents of fanaticism and distrust never far from the surface of the tale.

As the Storyteller, it's your job to make it *hurt* each time the Alliance is exposed. Send in enemies, or hold ugly things over your players' heads, if and when the secret slips out. Make other Alliance mages defend that secrecy... or risk it by being idiots, forcing the players to cover things up. Given the agendas of various Allies (especially the Wu Lung, Templars, and – if that metaplot's in play – the Hollow Ones), discovery would be catastrophic. Disparate mages might get along on the surface, but their common ground is extremely fragile. One misstep could fracture the Alliance.

Because the Alliance is a new concept within **Mage 20**, no previous sourcebooks address its details. **The Book of Crafts** and **Mage Storytellers Companion** detail most of the groups within the Alliance, though, and **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion**, **The Orphans Survival Guide**, **Tradition Book: Hollow Ones**, **Dragons of the East**, **Lost Paths: Ahl-i-Batin & Taftani**, and the various **Dead Magic** books provide material for the others. Future sourcebooks about the Alliance are planned as of this writing, but with regards to those books and to the future of the Alliance as a whole, only time will tell...

The Orphan Chronicle

And then you've got the mages who belong to no group beyond perhaps their own private circles. These orphaned mages either know nothing about the other sects, or else refuse

to become part of the larger wars. Although the stereotype of gutter mages isn't always true – some orphans are well off, even rich – the majority of these people live on the fringes of normative culture, either by choice or through bitter necessity. An orphan chronicle, then, would deal with Awakened misfits. Despite power and awareness, they have no place other than the places they make for themselves.

Features, Elements, and Themes

If the Ascension War doesn't appeal to you, you might choose to run an orphan chronicle that ignores the entire existence of that shadowy conspiracy. In that case, the orphans aren't actually orphaned at all – they're simply mages in a World of Darkness. You might make up your own sects and metaplot... or you could do so and then leave elements of the greater **Mage** milieu as distant, awful secrets. The orphan option also lets you run mages who know about the bigger War but still prefer to follow their own Paths. Such options are ideal for crossover tales that incorporate other World of Darkness games (see ***Crossovers***), or for one- or two-character chronicles that focus on Awakened folks dealing with life on a smaller scale. Films like π, *Lucy*, *The Craft*, and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* show what such a game might look like. You could ignore the vast tapestry of metaplots and factions in favor of a simpler tale – one whose drama comes not from ancient grudges or the War for Reality but from godlike power and human needs.

Freedom might be the primary theme within orphan chronicles, with related themes of *Independence*, *Survival*, *Precariousness*, *Realization*, *Mystery*, *Discovery*, *Ancient Secrets*, and *Self-definition*. An ominous mood tends to hang over such adventures, if only because an Awakened orphan, by definition, knows very little about the world at large and is figuring it out by trial and error. **The Orphans Survival Guide** deals specifically with independent mages and features a Storytelling chapter dedicated to such chronicles. Both editions of **World of Darkness: Sorcerer** offer plenty of information for independent chronicles, and **Destiny's Price** examines the nastier sides of street life. Beyond those sources, you can be as creative as you want to be, incorporating all sorts of technomagick or classical spellcraft if they appeal to your ideas.

The Mixed-Faction Chronicle

Especially in the 21st century, orthodoxy takes a back seat to survival. Thanks especially to the threats posed by Marauders, Night-Folk, the Fallen, and even the Masses, mages from hostile factions might find themselves sharing a very odd bed. We've covered that possibility earlier in this chapter (and in the **Prelude**, for that matter), and though the image of cyborgs and shamans getting along might seem like anathema to old-school mages (and certain **Mage** *players*, too), common ground may unite such rivals... if only for a short time.

Crossovers

Although mages often stand alone or among their own kind, the Awakened occasionally rub shoulders with vampires, werebeasts, the fae, and other denizens of impossible nights. **Chapter Ten** features information about such relationships **(on p.546)**, but from a Storytelling perspective a few things still need to be said.

First off, the various mages and Night-Folk do not – and *SHOULD* not – know details about one another's powers, customs, and fellowships. Even in the Internet age, where such details can probably be found scattered among various websites and exchanges, the average Akashic isn't going to meet a vampire and go, "*Oh, look – a 12th Generation True Brujah Antitribu!*" The secrets within the various World of Darkness games are guarded carefully, and for good reasons. Rivalries turn bloody in the night, and no one wants to be handing out weapons to potential enemies.

Secondly, certain groups would never work together willingly. No crisis, for example, could convince a Black Fury werewolf to suffer the presence of a Nephandus for any longer than the time it would take to clean him off her claws. Though some mages get along fine with "cousins" from like-minded groups (satyr kith, for example, partying with Cultists of Ecstasy), the majority of these secretive creatures have no reason to trust one another beyond simple courtesy... and often not even *that* far.

Thirdly, mages are rightly considered to be treacherous, greedy assholes by other creatures of the night. Those creatures aren't wrong: mages use vampire blood, werewolf claws, and faerie glamour as Quintessence. They claim Nodes, which to the werewolves are sacred ground. They order spirits around, treating ghosts like servants and Bygones like cannon fodder. Even if *your* mages don't act that way, the behavior of other Awakened folk has tainted the reputation of all willworkers. A crossover chronicle, therefore, will be drenched in suspicion and hostility, if only out of fear for what a mage, or vampire, or other entity might do when everyone else's back is turned... For details, see **Gods, Monsters, and Familiar Strangers**.

Features, Elements, and Themes

Depending upon the mages and factions involved, a mixed-faction chronicle could be tense but fair, strained yet courteous, tentatively friendly, or edge-of-the-blade hostile. Cordial alliances might be struck to pursue mysteries or treasures, and great threats could unite people who'd gladly kill each other next week. Wars, plagues, disasters, incursions... such situations have brought Tradition and Technocracy mages to the table before, especially when innocent lives depend on their cooperation. Those allies may quarrel, even fight, but if the motivation's strong enough, they'll bury their respective hatchets until the crisis ends... and might possibly even become friendly despite their traditional rivalries.

Love, too, has a way of building bridges in strange places. A Romeo-and-Juliet bond could produce an unlikely alliance... possibly even children and other sorts of families if that bond is strong enough. The uneasy friendship between Lee Ann and John Courage is based upon both parties deciding to skirt the party line in favor of individual trust and mutual respect. Such allies, obviously, must see something in one another that the greater factions refuse to recognize. And perhaps that recognition could lead, in time, to a greater reconciliation.

Then again, these rivals might hate one another's guts, stopping just short of vaporizing their tentative allies... for the moment, anyway. The tension between them invests these chronicles with urgent suspense. Such chronicles can be a lot of fun, with squabbling mages providing endless opportunities for insulting banter.

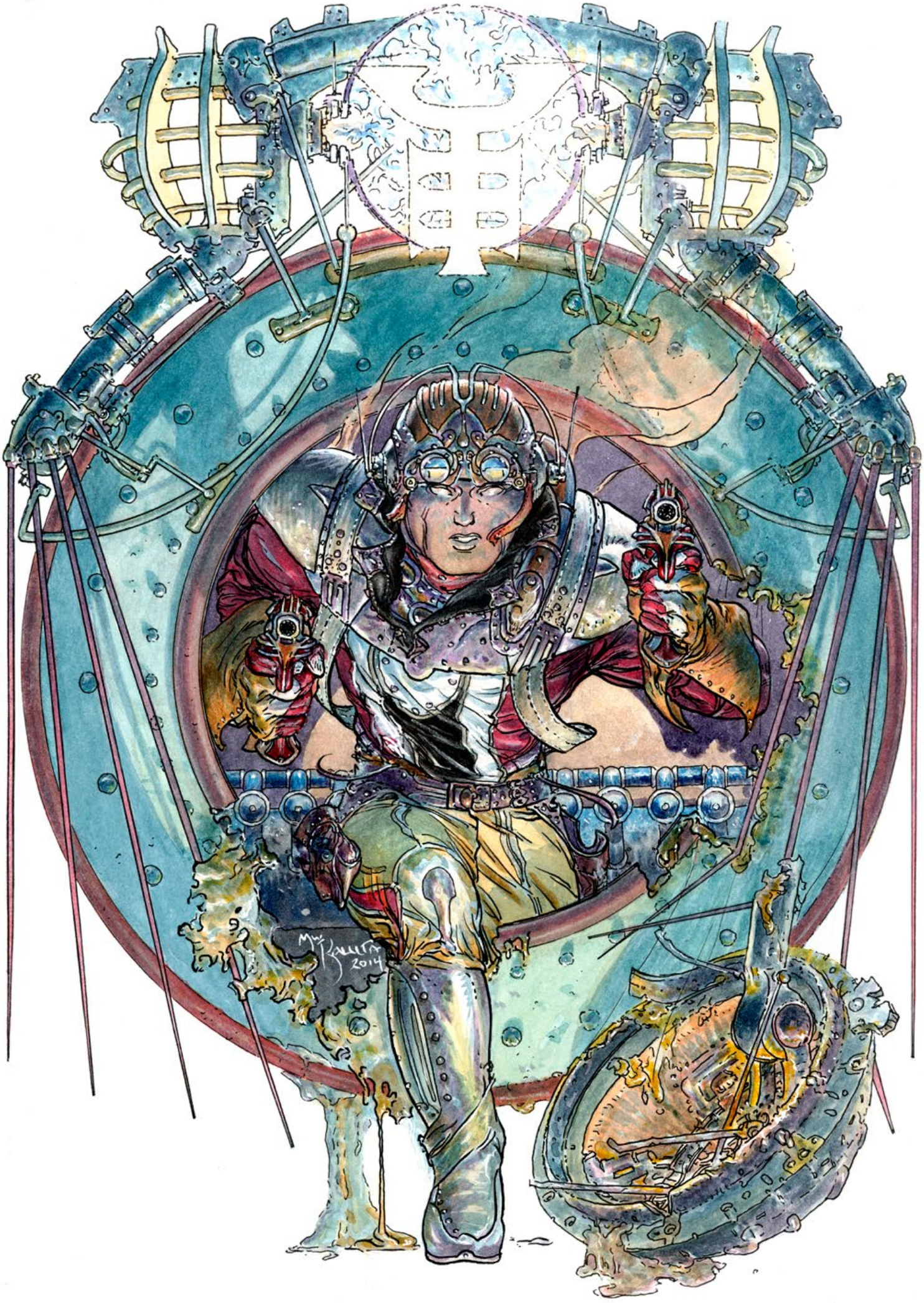
Obviously, a mixed-faction chronicle needs powerful motivation. Perhaps the Friends of Courage have discovered treachery within the Council as well. Maybe the Disparate Alliance recruits the Butcher Street Regulars to combat the Technocracy. The Technocracy and Traditions might realize that the Alliance exists and could have compelling reasons to stamp it out. Or the Fallen might have called in their final strike, and mages of all types must unite against it or die. Whatever the bond may be, it'll feature a ticking clock, high stakes, and a compelling reason to set old grudges aside.

Alliance, obviously, is the dominant theme of mixed-faction chronicles, with the other themes depending upon the situation that brought the rivals together. *Desperation*, *Survival*, *Catastrophe*, *Apocalypse*, *Inversion*, *Treachery*, perhaps even *Hope* all wind together when the Awakened face mutual destruction. And maybe, just *maybe*, that essence of hope will lead to a lasting peace... an end, perhaps, to a long Ascension War.

BOOK III: ASCEND

Power is merely polish on blunted blades.

Porthos Fitz-Empress,
The Fragile Path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Chapter Eight: The Book of Rules

How dreadful... to be caught up in a game and have no idea of the rules.
– Caroline Stevermer, *Sorcery & Cecelia: or The Enchanted Chocolate Pot*

Eight of Swords

Associations: *Order or the lack of it; use of energy; feeling fenced in; paranoia; vulnerability; isolation...*

It didn't take much. A few words in the right ears, a little push here and there, the right perfume and a dress to kill for. Glances just significant enough to mean something and yet mean nothing. Plausible deniability. Layers of it.

I'm good at what I do. Very good.

By the time Patel enters the room, the rumor's made its rounds. You can see it in the frozen smiles and the little hush that dips into the crowd when he walks in. The sidelong looks and whispered questions that pass between folks who don't think they're being watched. The sense of weight that comes from scrutiny.

Patel can feel it too.

The welcoming smile on his face loses some of its sincerity. The average person wouldn't note that, but I do. His cautious scan of the room, practiced enough to be almost undetectable, hides behind a veneer of cheerful celebration. It's a tough crowd now, though, and he knows it. The flicker in his eyes just might be the start of panic.

It was a lovely party, but it'll soon be time to go. My work here is through.

The Comfort of Rules

Imagination's fun, but sometimes you need rules to keep things straight. Ideally, those rules assure consistency, fairness, and a relatively reliable way to sort out tricky questions like *Can I grab that fire escape as I jump out the 8th story window?* In a world where magick can disassemble a police car, rules help us figure out how quickly you disassemble it, whether or not you know enough to disassemble it to begin with, and whether or not Paradox sledgehammers you into the pavement for mystically dismantling a cop car in front of the Channel 5 news team. (Answer #3: probably, yeah.)

Roll a d10

Despite the size of the book in your hands, the core of **Mage**'s Storyteller System is really simple: Roll one 10-sided die for every dot you have in a Trait or combination of Traits, compare the numbers on those dice to a target number called a *difficulty*, and then count all the dice that equal or exceed that number. This basic system has a few permutations, but most situations in your **Mage** chronicle – from wrecking cop cars to cooking a great meal – can be resolved quickly, easily, and fairly with the following rules.

The Golden Rule

Chances are good that you already know the most important rule in the Storyteller System. Even so, we'll kick off the rules chapter by reiterating it:

The rules are what you want them to be.

Seriously, it's easy to stall a game by rolling dice for every action or leaning too heavily on the wording of a sentence on page 384. Yes, the rules are important, especially if you want to avoid having hour-long arguments about the results of a vulgar Forces 4/ Prime 2 Effect. Even so, you'll want to keep the story moving, with dice rolls that enhance, not derail, the action. Long after the game is over, folks talk about the *drama* of a memorable session, not about the systems involved. And while there's a sort of drama that comes with a really great or awful roll at a critical time ("*I can't BELIEVE I botched that shot...*"), it's the deeds of our characters, and the fun we had while playing them, that linger on.

Consequently, the rules exist to serve your story, not the other way around. Use them when you need to, fudge them if you must (just be fair about it...), let them guide consistency and play, and abandon them if and when your group feels confident enough to let the action speak for itself.

Turns, Scenes, and Stories

When seconds count, or when hours pass, it's a good idea to know how quickly or slowly things transpire. In most cases, the flow of time in **Mage** is pretty fluid... especially if you're using Time magick to screw around with it. Our perceptions of time, in real life, often depend upon what's going on at that moment – an hour with your best friend and an hour in the dentist's chair don't feel the same at all! And so, in **Mage**, time gets measured by the activity involved.

- **Turn:** In game terms, a *turn* is the amount of time it takes to perform a fairly simple action. The exact length of a turn depends a lot on the action in question. An ***action turn*** – that is, a turn in combat, or under other every-moment-counts circumstances – lasts about three seconds, whereas a turn of heated conversation or other social interactions could last two or three minutes. Punching that creepy dude who grabbed at you takes a turn, and staring him down for a long moment until he feels like crawling off to go hide under a rock takes a turn.

  For more details about action turns, see **Chapter Nine** (p. 399).

- **Scene:** Like a dramatic moment within a TV show or play, a *scene* covers a single, self-contained sequence of events. This sequence could range from a few minutes to a few hours, depending on what's going on throughout that scene. If you come home, grab a snack, turn on the TV and see your Chantry House in flames, grab your phone, find out that it's dead, and then snatch up your katana and dash off out the door, that's a scene.

- **Chapter:** A series of related but separate scenes is called a *chapter*. Generally, chapters feature a distinct trajectory of *beginning*, *middle*, and *conclusion* – often with a cliffhanger tossed in at the end for good measure. In gameplay, a chapter usually covers one gaming session, includes a bit of downtime, and can represent hours, days, or even weeks in story terms. The tale that begins with a grabby dude on the subway, explodes with the Chantry House fire, and ends with your mage cradling her dying sister's body and swearing revenge... that's a chapter. Tune in next week!

- **Story:** A connected series of related chapters comprises a *story*. Here, that sequence of beginning, middle, and end follows several rises and falls, leading up to a climactic chapter that revolves the story... for the moment, at least. Some stories last a single session, whereas others stretch across a series of chapters until the climax resolves the tale. An adventure that begins with the Day From Hell and winds up with a battle in Hell itself becomes a story... one that might become part of the next category.

- **Story Arc**: A collection of related stories focusing on a common theme, object, character, or situation often gets referred to as a *story arc*. These stories are self-contained and yet united by their shared focus. The Day From Hell and Battle in Hell are, in the overall arc, parts of a larger saga. Like a story, this arc follows a series of rises and falls, reaches a climactic resolution, and leads into a new arc, based upon a new theme, with both of them being parts of the larger chronicle.

- **Chronicle:** When a series of stories or story arcs features the same overall cast of characters, you've got a *chronicle*. Within that chronicle, you can trade off lead characters, switch locations, move certain cast members and gamers in and out of the group, so long as the core of the group and its story remain consistent. The flaming Chantry House, dying sister, and battle in Hell were just one story in the ongoing saga of your cabal... and that saga becomes the chronicle of your group's adventures.

- **Downtime:** The "time between events," *downtime* reflects those long periods where nothing important happens. Driving across the country tends to involve downtime; a month of digging through the local library for research, the recovery involved in a broken leg, the endless days spent writing a book... unless your group wants to play out an important event within that span of time, those hours, days, or months between crises become downtime in your chronicle. If your mage goes on a series of unremarkable dates while recovering from heartbreak, these meet-ups probably occur "offstage" in downtime.

What Do You Do During Downtime?

Extended periods of downtime offer great opportunities for your characters to rest, recuperate from injuries, learn new skills or Spheres, move to a new neighborhood, train a puppy, or do other things that don't lend themselves to dramatic tales.

Game-wise, downtime gives everyone a chance to spend experience points, raise Traits, make minor changes to their lives, and do other stuff that impacts the later sessions of that chronicle. Generally, the Storyteller asks his players, "So what'd you guys do during the downtime?" Creative players can write up short stories about their characters' activities (a practice that legendary game designer Aaron Allston called *blue-booking*), and others can simply go, "*Spider's gonna practice on her fire-spinning*" or "*Malcolm wants to drive up to Canada for a few weeks*." Unless something critical happens during that interlude, the characters reunite when downtime ends and events bring them together again.

Rolling Dice

As mentioned earlier, the **Mage** rules revolve around the rolling of 10-sided dice. You've probably got a collection of them already. If not, they're easy to find at any gaming store or website. You'll probably want at least 10 of them. Many gamers have dozens, with special favorites for certain games or situations. It's up to you.

Dice Pools and Trait Ratings

In the character creation chapter, we covered the many Traits and the dots associated with each of them. For every dot, you roll one 10-sided die. The collection of dice involved with a given task is called your *dice pool*, and it changes depending on the Traits involved. If your mage has four dots in Dexterity and three dots in Stealth, his dice pool uses seven dice when he's trying to sneak past some guards. If he wants to climb a wall, that's a different dice pool – let's say those four dots in Dexterity, plus his two dots in Athletics, for a total dice pool of six.

What constitutes a decent dice pool? Generally, you'll want at least four dice in a given roll. Aswe saw in the ***Trait Ratings*** section of **Chapter Six**, low numbers of dots reflect a low aptitude for the task at hand. The more dots – and thus, dice – you have to work with, the greater your chance of great success becomes.

The typical human scale for Traits runs from zero to five dots. Think of each dot as a die in your hand when you've got to roll for a task, and you'll see why the number of dots can be pretty important – especially for heroic tasks or magick, where a single success doesn't do you that much good. (See ***Degrees of Success***,below.)

As mentioned earlier, Trait ratings work out this way, with rising odds for success:

X	Abysmal/ No Chance
•	Poor/ Miniscule Chance
••	Average/ Middling Chance
•••	Good/ Decent Chance
••••	Exceptional/ Good Chance
•••••	Superb/ Rather Good Chance
••••• •	Legendary/ Really Good Chance

Paradoxically, a large number of dice gives you both the opportunity to do something heroic and the ability to screw up catastrophically – see ***Botching***, below. That's the risk that heroes take: the chance to shine, and the chance to fall.

Difficulties

That chance to fail involves *difficulties* – those target numbers that determine whether or not you succeed with a task. Put simply, a difficulty number shows how hard it is to accomplish that task. Easy tasks have low difficulty numbers, and hard ones have higher numbers.

When you roll the dice, you want to equal or exceed the difficulty number. If that number's 7, you want to score a 7, 8, 9, or 10 on each die. Each number that equals or exceeds the difficulty is called a *success*; the more successes you roll, the better you do. If you don't roll *any* dice that exceed the difficulty number, then you fail. (We'll go more into that subject under ***Success*** and ***Failure***,below.)

For most tasks, the default difficulty number is 6. If there's not a specific difficulty number mentioned for a given task, then assume that difficulty is 6. The Storyteller always has the final word on the difficulty for a given situation.

Really simple tasks – those rated at difficulty 3 or 4 – don't usually require a roll unless the consequences of failure are particularly severe (like getting caught using your boss's computer) or the character in question has very little chance of succeeding at even the simplest task (that is, he has a dice pool lower than four). In most cases otherwise, simply consider the task an ***automatic success*** (again, see below).

A roll of 10 is always a success unless there was no way you could have performed that task to begin with. Not even a 10 will help you shoot the moon out of the sky!

For examples of potential tasks and their associated difficulties, see the chart nearby.

Modified Difficulties and Dice Pools

Under certain circumstances – say, in high winds or driving rain – a task might be more challenging than usual. In such cases, the Storyteller might raise the difficulty one to three steps above its usual level (+1 to +3 difficulty). In the opposite case – say, really favorable circumstances – the difficulty might fall a step or two (-1 or -2 difficulty).

On a related note, a character might find a given task harder than usual because of internal circumstances – injuries, fears, disorientation, etc. In that case, the Storyteller might tell her to take some dice out of the pool she would normally use. On the other hand, favorable internal circumstances might boost her usual chances, adding to her dice pool.

Examples: *Malcolm's trying to make a business deal. Let's say that his would-be client doesn't trust an African businessman. Normally, Malcolm's difficulty would be 6 – he does this stuff all the time. Thanks to his potential client's resistance, however, that difficulty is 8 in this situation.*

Now let's say that Malcolm has a migraine. Normally, he's got a dice pool of seven for this sort of deal. Now, though, the headache's

Difficulties and Successes

Typical difficulties range from 3 to 9. For nigh-impossible challenges, see ***Thresholds***.

Difficulty	Examples
3	Trivial (hopping a creek)
4	Easy (cooking a meal)
5	Straightforward (changing the oil in your car)
6	Standard (punching someone in the face)
7	Challenging (comprehending a book by Crowley)
8	Difficult (playing all of "2112" on your guitar)
9	Extreme (sealing a multimillion-dollar business deal with reluctant partners)

DEGREES OF SUCCESS

The more successes you roll, the better your character performs. For details, see ***Extended Actions*** and ***Success***.

One success	Marginal (finding a helpful TV Tropes entry)
Two Successes	Moderate (getting someone's cell-phone number)
Three Successes	Complete (delighting your new playmate with a fresh-cooked breakfast)
Four Successes	Exceptional (selling five books to someone who'd come looking for one)
Five or More Successes	Phenomenal (writing the 500,000-word anniversary edition of a series you helped create 20 years ago)

throwing off his game; instead of those seven dice, he's presently working with five.

Wound penalties (see *Health and Injury* in Chapter Eight, pp. 406-409) provide one instance of reduced dice pools. Many Merits, Flaws, and modifiers can move difficulty numbers up and down, making certain tasks easier and other tasks harder under given sets of circumstances.

Optional Rule: Thresholds

Certain tasks are so challenging that, even when given steep odds, they demand a lot more success than usual. Thus, we have the *optional rule* of thresholds: when your character faces an almost impossible challenge, the Storyteller sets a certain number of successes that you must roll in order to meet that challenge. That number of successes becomes a *threshold*: the minimum number of successes you have to roll before you succeed. This way, instead of rolling against difficulty 10, you roll against difficulty 9, with a threshold of perhaps one additional success... which means you must now roll *two* successes, rather than just one, in order to succeed at all.

For every level of a threshold, that threshold removes one success rolled. A threshold of one removes one success, a threshold of two removes two successes, and so on. Where one success normally means you succeeded at your task, the threshold rule means that you have to roll several successes before your task succeeds.

The threshold rule can also reflect an easier task that involves a lot of work. You might face a task with a difficulty of 6, but with a threshold of four... and in that case, you'd need to roll at least five successes in order to complete that task successfully.

Threshold	Minimum Successes Rolled
One	Two successes rolled in order to succeed at all
Two	Three successes rolled in order to succeed at all
Three	Four successes rolled in order to succeed at all
Four	Five successes rolled in order to succeed at all
Five	Six successes rolled in order to succeed at all

As explained under the section called ***Botching***, every 1 you roll on your dice takes away one success that you *did* roll; if you roll one success and one 1 on the dice, then that 1 removes your one success and you get nothing. In the case of the threshold rule, successes taken away by the threshold get removed *before* the successes removed by a 1. If all of your successes get negated by the threshold, you fail. Nice try, but the task was just too difficult for your character to accomplish. And if you didn't roll *any* successes at all, then you're in real trouble... (Again, see ***Botching***, below.)

Example: *Jennifer Rollins wants to break into the mansion of a TV network honcho. He's got an elaborate infrared security camera system, so Jennifer's player has to be really good in order to get past it. Given the challenges involved, the Storyteller gives that roll a threshold of three successes at difficulty 7. Holy crap.*

The mage tries to sneak past the security cameras. Jennifer's player rolls eight dice for Jennifer's Dexterity + Stealth attempt. If she rolls four successes, Jennifer manages to get past the cameras; if she rolls only three successes, though, she'll fail.

Now let's say that Jennifer's player rolls NO successes and a 1; she botched that roll. Jennifer steps in the wrong place at the wrong time, the security camera catches her in the act, guards notice the would-be intruder, and the chase is on...

Actions: The Various Types

Simply put, an *action* is whatever you choose to have your character do. She soothes a barking dog? An action. Calls her boss? An action. Takes out a knife and cuts runes into her skin to summon a murder of crows? An action. Most actions take a turn or two, though some especially complex ones – like, say, car repair or a long ritual – can last quite a while.

Generally, you won't have to roll when performing an action. Calling your boss, for instance, doesn't demand a roll unless something critical is at stake. *That's* when the dice come out. If there's a chance that success or failure will make a dramatic difference in the story, then your Storyteller will probably tell you to "Make a [whatever] + [whatever] roll, difficulty [whatever]." The success or failure of your roll determines where the story goes from there.

In general, it's a good idea to save the rolls for situations in which failure could have drastic effects. Otherwise, dice rolls slow the action down. If the action in question simply moves the plot forward, then bypass the rolls. That way, the dice come out only when the future of your next action depends on your success with this one.

For examples of various actions and their associated rolls, see ***Dramatic Feats*** in **Chapter Nine**, pp. 403-405.

Example: *Jennifer Rollins needs to get past a pit bull in order to break into that network honcho's house. Chained up in the front yard, that dog begins to growl as Jennifer approaches. "I'm gonna whisper softly to the pup," says Jennifer's player, "and use my affinity with animals to let me pass."*

The Storyteller nods. "Roll Charisma + Animal Kinship, difficulty 8."

"Difficulty EIGHT?" The player cocks an eyebrow. "That's pretty high."

The Storyteller shrugs. "It's a guard dog. You're a stranger. Roll."

Between Jennifer's Charisma 4 and her Animal Kinship 3, the player has seven dice in her dice pool. She rolls. The dice come up 2, 4, 8, 9, 3, 6, and 6. Given a difficulty of 8, her roll scores two successes – the 8 and the 9. Jennifer calms the dog and proceeds onward. If she hadn't rolled that 8 and 9, things would have gone very differently.

Simple Action

In game terms, a *simple action* is a straightforward task that requires a single success. Firing a gun or shooting someone a nasty look – those are simple actions.

A simple action typically takes one turn, although the turn in question could reflect a fair length of time. You might need a single successin order to fix a broken fuel pump, but the repair job itself takes an hour or two as far as the characters are concerned.

An activity that involves a number of die rolls before it's completed, with chances for failure coming up several times within that span of time, would be an ***extended action*** – the details of which are explained below.

Reflexive Action

An action that takes no real time or deliberate effort to perform is called a *reflexive action*. Spending Willpower is reflexive. Noticing something that's going on right in front of you (as opposed to searching around to find it) is reflexive, and so is a brief shout or exchange of words. If Malcolm wants to tell Jennifer, "*Look behind you*," that's reflexive – it takes no time. If he wants to hold a lengthy conversation with her, though, that would involve a full action, not a reflexive one.

Essentially, a reflexive action takes no measurable gametime – it's more or less automatic, or requires little conscious effort. In game terms, you probably don't have to roll dice at all unless the reflex itself (like soaking damage with your Stamina, as described in **Chapter Nine**, pp. 412-413) involves rolling dice on the player's part.

Action Complications

For the most part, that's how the system works: when you need to determine the success or failure of a given task, roll your dice pool against the difficulty, count the successes, and see how well you did.

In certain circumstances, though, you may want to reflect more complicated actions – a long ritual, a contest between opposing parties, an "action" that involves a series of several different related actions. And for those situations, the rules offer the following *action complications*:

Multiple Actions

When your mage tries to do several things at once, you need to divide your dice pool between those actions. Under the older World of Darkness rules, this was called *splitting your dice pool*. The **20th Anniversary Edition** rules, however, simplify the previous system.

In story terms, your character divides his concentration between several simultaneous tasks, and so he performs each of them with less focus than he would normally employ. In game terms, the player divides the dice between those tasks, using fewer dice than usual in order to get the desired results.

To perform several actions within a single turn, first figure out the dice pools you would normally use for those actions, and then *use the lowest dice pool among them*. If one task gives you a pool of six dice and the other gives you a pool of four dice, you would then have four dice to work with. You can

divide those four dice between the tasks in whichever way you wish – three dice to the first action, one to the second, two dice to each action, and so forth.

Certain magicks (Time 3) or Traits allow you to do several things at once without subtracting the usual penalties. Under normal circumstances, though, a character attempting several actions within the same turn requires the player to divide up her dice pools as described above.

Example: *Spider Chase tries to spin fire while observing several people on the fringes of her performance. Spinning the fire involves her Dexterity + Athletics dice pool, and observing uses her Perception + Alertness dice pool.*

Spider's Dexterity 3 and Athletics 4 give her a dice pool of seven dice. Spider's Perception 3 and Alertness 2 give her five dice. Spider's player has five dice to divide up between the two tasks.

Extended Actions

When your character embarks upon a long and complex process, you employ an *extended action*: a series of dice rolls that reflects a time-consuming activity. Research, repair, memorization, performance, rituals – these tasks, and others like them, involve extended actions.

At the beginning of the task, the Storyteller picks a certain number of successes that you need to reach before the task is completed. If you need 15 successes to repair an engine, for instance, then you roll until you get 15 successes. Each roll of the dice represents a passage of time – 10 minutes, an hour, six hours, whatever seems appropriate. Quick tasks would use shorter intervals – say, 10 minutes or so – whereas complicated ones would use longer intervals, like an hour or more.

How many rolls do you get? That depends on the circumstances. Generally, a task with a limited amount of time (like a concert, a ritual, a one-hour class, etc.) has between three and five rolls. Under relaxed circumstances, you could take however long you need, with each roll reflecting one hour, six hours, a day, or some other fitting interval. Because adventures typically involve a race against time, however, you'll usually have a set number of rolls with which to succeed or fail. Within three 10-minute rolls, for example, your fate is sealed.

Extended rolls come into play when mages performs ***Rituals***, as described in the section of that name in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 538-542). That section details the specific rules involved in rituals. For now, though, just remember that those extended tasks use extended rolls.

Failing or Botching an Extended Roll

The longer you spend on an activity, the more chance you have of screwing it up. And so, any extended action includes the possibilities of failure and disaster. A failed roll simply means that you make no progress that time around. A botch, however, means that the entire effort fails – probably in spectacular fashion. You might be able to pick up the pieces and start over from scratch, losing all of your previously rolled successes. In most cases, though, a botch rolled during an extended action reflects a catastrophic failure, after which no further attempts are possible.

It's often a good idea, then, to spend Willpower (see below) during an extended roll in which the stakes are fairly high. That way, you reflect the character's intense concentration and give yourself a higher chance of success.

Example: *Painted Horse gets ready to perform a hoop dance – a complex storytelling ritual dance involving almost a dozen brightly painted hoops. To perform it correctly, Painted Horse's player needs to roll three times, get at least four successes, and avoid blowing any of those rolls.*

The drummers start playing. Singers begin chanting. "Okay," says the Storyteller – "three rolls, Dexterity + Art, difficulty 7, four successes or more. GO!"

Optional Rule: Complementary Rolls

Knowing one thing can often help you accomplish something else. To reflect this, the complementary roll option – referred to in the **Mage Storyteller's Handbook** as *synchronous Abilities* – allows a player to use success in one task to aid success in another.

Under this *optional rule*, the player can make a roll with one task to assist the performance of a related task. A successful Perception + Etiquette roll, for example, could help a visiting mage make a good impression. Each success on that roll reduces the difficulty of the other roll by -1 for each success over the first (-1 difficulty for two successes, -2 for three, and so forth), up to a maximum of -3.

Example: *Lee Ann doesn't understand Greek social customs when she meets the Pen & Paper cabal in Athens. Having picked up a few dots in Alertness and Etiquette during her adventures, however, she tries to use one to help the other. Observing other people around her, she tries to pick up appropriate phrases and body language. At the table, Lynn rolls Lee Ann's Perception + Alertness, and scores three successes.*

Slightly later, as Lee Ann meets Antonios, the leader of the cabal, she incorporates the things she's learned into her greeting. Because she'd been making an effort to pick up cues, Lynn's Storyteller lowers the difficulty on Lee Ann's Etiquette roll from 6 to 4. As a result, Lynn rolls four successes – an exceptional victory. Even though she doesn't know the language, Lee Ann greets Antonios in perfect Greek style, with enough social cues to make a wonderful impression. Giving her a massive hug, Antonios ushers the visitor in to meet his friends.

Jackie – who's playing Painted Horse – tosses the first roll. Two successes. In the story, Painted Horse whirls around, spinning his hoops in intricate patterns. The audience watches, enthralled.

Second roll. No successes. Painted Horse missteps, going slightly off-beat. It's not a bad mistake, but it throws off his concentration.

If Jackie scores at least two more successes, then Painted Horse ends the hoop dance amidst cheers and appreciation. If Jackie blows the last roll, he remains off-beat and concludes with a polite but disappointed smattering of applause. And if Jackie botches that final roll, then Painted Horse's hoops tangle, he slips, and the entire dance ends in a cascade of bright hoops and crushing humiliation.

Jackie scowls and prepares the final throw...

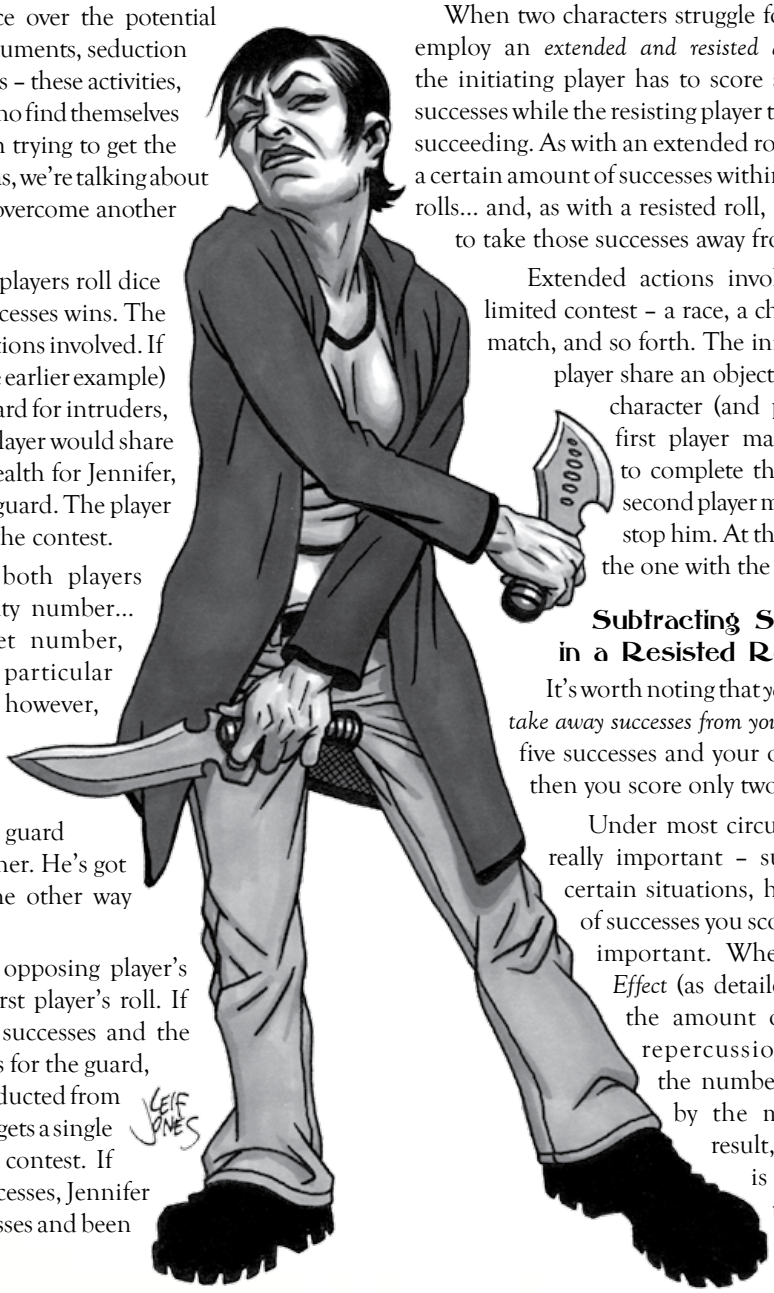
Resisted Actions

Certain actions take place over the potential objections of other people. Arguments, seduction attempts, hide-and-seek contests – these activities, and others, involve characters who find themselves at cross-purposes, each of them trying to get the better of the other. In game terms, we're talking about a *resisted action*: an attempt to overcome another character's resistance.

In a resisted action, both players roll dice and the one with the most successes wins. The dice pools depend upon the actions involved. If a security guard (to return to the earlier example) were scanning his employer's yard for intruders, the Storyteller and Jennifer's player would share a resisted roll – Dexterity + Stealth for Jennifer, Perception + Alertness for the guard. The player with the most successes wins the contest.

More often than not, both players roll against the same difficulty number... typically the standard target number, 6. If one character has a particular advantage or disadvantage, however, that difficulty might go up or down. Jennifer's sneaking in at night? She's got a lower difficulty to hide, whereas the guard has a higher difficulty to spot her. He's got infrared goggles? Then it's the other way around.

In a resisted action, the opposing player's successes subtract from the first player's roll. If Jennifer's player scores three successes and the Storyteller scores two successes for the guard, then those two successes get deducted from the original three. Jennifer still gets a single success, but it's a really close contest. If the guard had gotten three successes, Jennifer would have lost all of her successes and been spotted by the guard.



Example: *Malcolm makes a presentation in favor of a corporate merger. His would-be client remains skeptical. "So, Steve," says the Storyteller to Malcolm's player, "make your pitch for Malcolm. Charisma + Finance, resisted action, difficulty 8." They both roll.*

Steve scores two successes. Malcolm's pitch is solid but not inspiring. The Storyteller scores one success. That deducts one success from Steve's two, leaving Steve (and, by extension, Malcolm) with a single success.

In the story, the client takes a long moment to consider the proposal. "All right," he says at last. "You've changed my mind." It's a narrow victory but an accomplishment nonetheless.

Extended and Resisted Actions

When two characters struggle for victory, you might employ an *extended and resisted action*. In this case, the initiating player has to score a certain number of successes while the resisting player tries to keep him from succeeding. As with an extended roll, you need to gather a certain amount of successes within a certain number of rolls... and, as with a resisted roll, the other player tries to take those successes away from you.

Extended actions involve a sustained and limited contest – a race, a chess game, a wrestling match, and so forth. The initiating character and player share an objective that the opposing character (and player) opposes. The first player makes a series of rolls to complete that objective, and the second player makes a series of rolls to stop him. At the end of the final roll, the one with the most successes wins.

Subtracting Successes in a Resisted Roll

It's worth noting that *your opponent's successes take away successes from your own roll*. If you roll five successes and your opponent rolls three, then you score only two successes.

Under most circumstances, that's not really important – success is success. In certain situations, however, the number of successes you score becomes *incredibly* important. When a mage casts an *Effect* (as detailed in **Chapter Ten**), the amount of damage or other repercussions depends upon the number of successes rolled by the mage's player. As a result, if another character is resisting that roll, then the mage's Effect is significantly less

Action Summaries

Action	Description	Examples
Reflexive	No roll	Spending Willpower, soaking damage, saying something brief.
Simple	One roll, one success needed	Throwing a punch, looking up to spot someone, making a clever remark designed to impress someone.
Multiple	Divide *lowest* dice pool between actions	Pulling out a wrench and hitting someone with it, running to a door and then yanking it shut.
Extended	Several rolls, with an assigned number of successes	Fixing a computer, conducting a ritual.
Resisted	Opposing players roll against each other	Grabbing an angry cat, impressing a potential client.
Extended and Resisted	Several rolls against each other	Bathing angry cat, arguing online to impress an audience.

"effective." For details, see ***Dodging and Resistance*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 544-545).

Example: *Spider noticed that one of the guys she'd been spying on during her performance has been talking with a Laughing Rose cultist. The guy she's been spying on has noticed Spider spying. Taking the cultist by the arm, he hustles off into the crowd. Spider follows.*

Spider's kind of obvious in a crowd, so her player's difficulty is higher than usual – difficulty 7. "All right," says the Storyteller, "roll at least five successes if you want to catch them before they leave the party. They're trying to ditch you, though. You've got just three rolls to catch up with them, or they're gone."

Comparing Spider's dice pool of Dexterity + Stealth (using the crowd so that she doesn't get noticed) to the guy's Perception + Stealth (to notice her anyway), the resisted action begins...

Spider's player rolls the first roll: three successes. The Storyteller rolls for the cultist and the guy: two successes. Spider manages to tail her quarry, but they figure out that she's on to them.

Second roll: Spider gets one success. The Storyteller rolls two successes. Now Spider has no successes – she's spotted! Good luck on that final roll...

Trying Again

Difficulty	Previous Attempts
+1	One failed attempt.
+2	Two failed attempts.
+3	Three failed attempts.
+4	Why bother?
+5	Go home.

Making one final attempt to melt into the crowd while keeping her prey in sight, Spider's player does a final roll. Four successes! Maybe this'll work... The Storyteller smiles, picks up the dice, and rolls...

Teamwork

Cooperation makes certain actions easier. Thus, in cases in which several characters work together on a given task – say a performance, medical procedures, etc. – you can let each of those players roll for that task, combine their successes, and complete the task more easily.

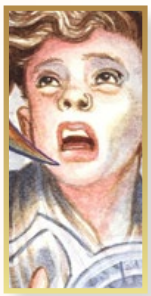
Such cooperation works best with extended actions – scoring five successes is simpler when three players combine their rolls. Each roll *is* separate, however. The results don't get combined until everyone has made a roll. One player might roll a single success, another fails, and a third gets three successes; the first and third player merge their successes for a total of four successes.

Generally, a botched roll on any player's part ruins the whole attempt. A botch, after all, reflects a catastrophe, so it stands to reason that a botch for one is a failure for all. Even so, a cooperating character who manages to separate her efforts from the other character can "take the botch on" herself. That way, the entire effort may continue even if the botching character blows her effort.

Example: *Spotting the Laughing Rose cultist and Spider's interest in the other guy, Jinx moves in to support Spider's observation. Inky (Spider's player) rolls two successes. Camille (Jinx's player) rolls one, for a total of three successes between them. Teamwork!*

On the next roll, though, Camille botches the roll. No successes, plus a 1. The crowd parts suddenly, and the cultist spots Jinx. "Shit," says Camille. "I'll take that on myself, then." Pointing at the cultist, Jinx distracts the prey from Spider, and the game continues...

Failure



Mages aren't perfect. If you score no successes at all, your character fails the task at hand. Spider loses her prey; Jennifer gets spotted; Painted Horse messes up his dance; Malcolm's client refuses the deal. Whatever you were trying to do, it didn't work. Damn.

Trying It Again

In the case of a simple failure, you might be able to try again. Maybe Malcolm or Painted Horse can convince the audience to give them another shot, or Jennifer manages to lose herself in the darkness again. Once again, the player picks up the dice to roll.

This time, however, the difficulty rises. For each failed attempt, add +1 to the difficulty level of the next try. This reflects a combination of stress and frustration, often added to the challenge of impressing a skeptical audience who's already seen you fall on your face. (See *Trying Again* on p. 391.)

Example: *Crap. Spider loses her prey in the crowd. She glances over at the street where the cars are parked. There they are! As the cultist and the guy glance around themselves, Spider tries once again to follow them. They're wary now, though, so her difficulty goes up by +1 to difficulty 8.*

New Tools or Tactics

In certain cases, you might try again with a different set of tools or tactics. If, instead of trying to win his client over in the office, Malcolm offers to grab drinks with the would-be client and then approaches the deal from a different angle – making friends with the client and thus changing his attitude while disguising the pitch as a casual conversation – the Storyteller could give the player a second chance without penalties. This time out, Malcolm's player employs Charisma + Subterfuge – same difficulty, same successes needed, but a different approach to the problem.

In such cases, you should define how your approach to the problem differs from the previous attempts. Is Jennifer using a concealment spell? Does Spider appear to give up the chase? Will Painted Horse try to pass his failure off as an intentional part of the act? If the player can come up with a new and clever approach to the problem, the Storyteller should let him treat that like a fresh attempt at the task.

Example: *Painted Horse laughs at himself, jokes, gets the audience back on his side. Juggling the hoops, he launches into an improvised monolog about being a sacred fool. As he speaks, he starts spinning the hoops in a dazzling new configuration.*

"Charisma + Expression," says the Storyteller. "Difficulty 7."

"Painted Horse," says Jackie, "has a total dice pool of seven for that."

Botches and Magick

Botches get especially critical when you're casting magick:

- A botch on a *coincidental magick* Effect inflicts one automatic Paradox point for every dot in the highest Sphere involved. (A botched Sphere 4 Effect = four Paradox points.)
- Botching a vulgar Effect *without* witnesses inflicts one Paradox point, plus another point for every dot in the highest Sphere involved. (That Sphere 4 Effect = five Paradox points.)
- Botching a vulgar Effect *with* witnesses inflicts two Paradox points plus two more Paradox points per dot in the highest Sphere involved. (Now that Sphere 4 Effect = 10 Paradox points.)

Under the Reckoning metaplot, the amount of Paradox can be even higher. For more details and explanations, see ***Paradox in Mage Revised* p. 550**.

Magick and the "Free-Botch" Option

Some World of Darkness rulebooks suggest a *"free-botch" option*; this way, the Storyteller can ignore one botch per game session.

But because botches are so critical to the magick rules in **Mage**, we do not recommend ignoring *any* botches rolled when a player casts a magickal Effect. Magick's supposed to be dangerous and unpredictable, especially when it's vulgar magick cast by mages whose Arts violate the laws of scientific reality. A lot of that danger gets lost if botches are ignored, so although your group might employ the free-botch option with regard to non-magickal tasks, we suggest that every botched magick roll counts.

"I'll give it to you as an automatic action, then," replies the Storyteller. "You're on. They're with you. Try that Dexterity + Art roll again, difficulty 7, same as before."

"Thanks," says Jackie. "Let's do this."

The audience watches as Jackie picks up the dice and prepares to roll again...

Botching and the Rule of One

And then there are the failures you can't recover from – the scattered hoops; the angry client; the trespasser caught by the guard, dog, and cameras. That's a *botch*: a catastrophic failure that leaves the character in a worse situation than he'd been in before things started.

Story-wise, a botch reflects spectacular bad luck: the sirens go off, the parkour expert slips, the computer fizzles in a puff of smoke. In short, you're done. It's time to dust yourself off and try again... if that's even possible. Although a botch shouldn't flat-out kill your character, it ought to leave him at a distinct disadvantage. That's the risk you take when you try to be a hero.

Game-wise, every 1 you roll takes away one success from your roll. Think of this as "the rule of one." If your 1s cancel out your successes, you fail; roll three successes, roll three 1s, and you're left right where you were before.

Assuming that you rolled even *one* success, even after the 1s cancel out all your successes, then your character simply fails.

But if you don't roll *any* successes *and* you roll a 1, then you botch.

That's where things get ugly. A high difficulty makes it harder for you to score a success, so the odds of a spectacular catastrophe go up as you attempt more challenging feats. If Jennifer tries to sneak through the yard in broad daylight (difficulty 9), her chances of getting caught right out in the open (a botch) go way up because she's not likely to roll any 9s or 10s.

If you roll *several* 1s and no successes, then you botch in a big way. A single botch might prove embarrassing, but a botch with three 1s – a triple botch – could prove fatal. The Storyteller gets the final say, but impressive botches should have impressively terrible results.

Example: *Spider's prey knows she's out there. Her difficulty to track them through the crowd is 8. Inky rolls her dice and gets the following results: 1, 3, 5, 7, 1, 6. A double botch! Spider's bulky boots catch on the edge of the pavement, tripping her into three girls she'd been trying to use as cover. Drinks spill. Curses fly. Spider glances up, but the Laughing Rose cultist and the guy she'd been following are both long gone.*

Botches and Thresholds

Because a high difficulty number makes it hard to score even a single success, the player and Storyteller can decide to handle the task with a threshold (see p.387) rather than with a single roll. In story terms, the character decides to take a longer, more careful approach; in game terms, the Storyteller lowers the difficulty in exchange for an extended roll. This way, the task takes longer but might have a lower chance of botching.

Example: *Malcolm works carefully this time. Rather than pressing the business deal, he takes the client out for drinks... then to a strip club... then for more drinks at another strip club. "I'll work this guy all night," says Steve. "No hurry here." The Storyteller agrees to an extended action at a lower difficulty – three rolls, four successes, difficulty 6.*

Steve piles on the charm with Malcolm's Charisma + Subterfuge. By the end of the evening (three rolls later), Steve has accumulated six successes and Malcolm has the client eating out of his hand.

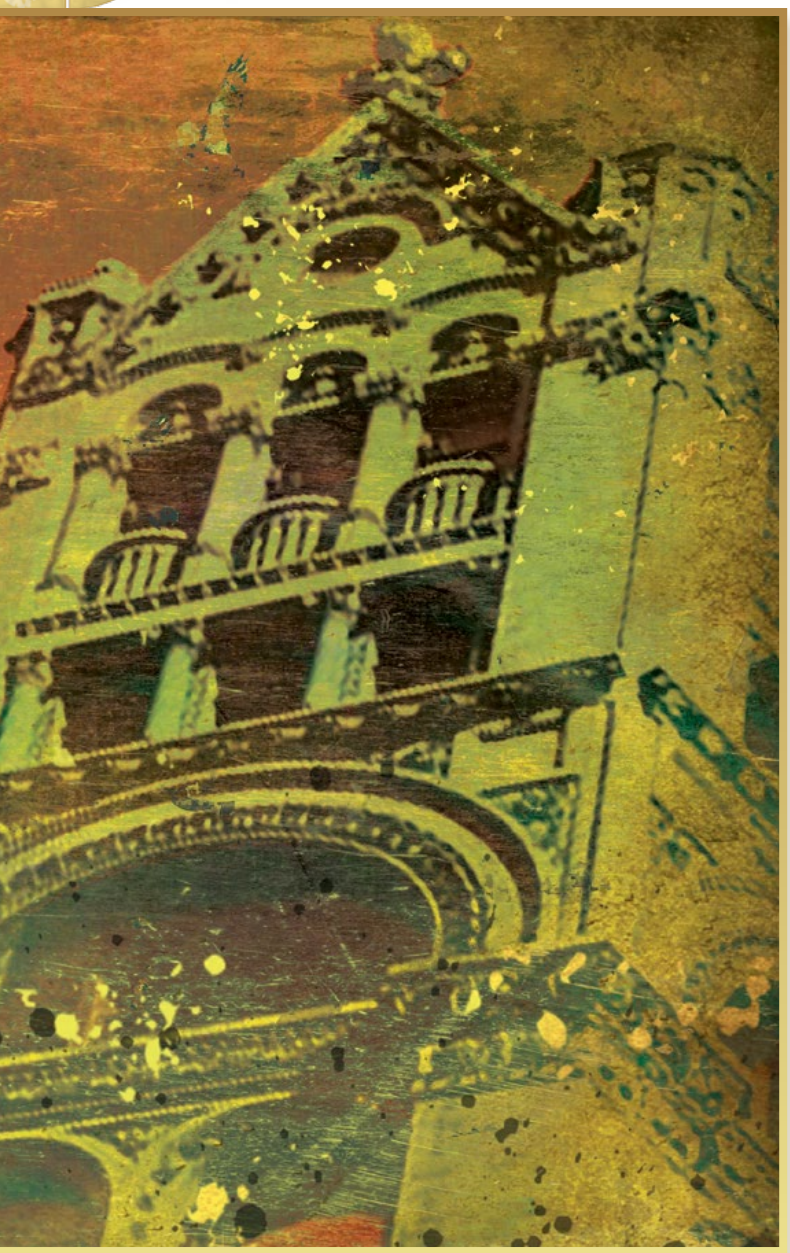
Success

Success, obviously, is success. You made the roll, gathered enough successes, didn't botch. You're golden.

Some successes, though, mean more than others. You can leap across a gap between roofs, flail awkwardly, grab the lip of one rooftop and barely pull yourself across... or you can sail through the air like a champion gymnast, nail the landing, and roll to your feet with a grace that leaves folks ready to applaud. Especially with regards to tasks like performances and athletic feats, the difference between a marginal success and a phenomenal one can mean the difference between a half-decent concert and Jimi Hendrix burning his Strat at the Monterey Pop festival.

Automatic Success

In many cases, there's no point in rolling dice. Your character excels at what he does, and the dice would simply slow the story down. In situations where your mage is "just *that* good," your Storyteller can simply say, "You did it – let's move on." That's an *automatic success*.



As a guideline, assume that if you've got a dice pool that equals or exceeds the difficulty of a task and the story's not hinging on your success or failure at the time, then you've got an automatic success. Malcolm's great at making deals; Spider spins fire like a champ; Jennifer's good at sneaking around and gets on well with animals; Painted Horse can spin hoops and charm an audience.These characters do these things so well that under most circumstances we don't even bother to roll and see how well they do in their respective fields.

But when the heat is on, or when the player and his character want to really blow folks away, then the dice come out. The automatic success rule doesn't apply to combat situations (unless perhaps it's an Akashic Master and two drunk morons in a bar), and it's not good for extended actions – much less resisted ones – unless the character is just *so* damned skillful that success is still pretty much assured. (Malcolm, for instance, excels at sealing deals; that's why he's *That Guy* at his corporation.) If a single success is all you need, the automatic success rule works just fine.

Spending Willpower

Focus makes a huge difference, especially when you're the heroic type. In game terms, you can spend a point of Willpower **(see *Using Willpower* in Chapter Six, p. 330)** to get one automatic success even under stressful conditions. By putting serious focus behind the task at hand, your character pushes past his usual limits. Though you can spend only one point of Willpower per turn – but several during an extended action – you can avoid botching and give your character a better chance at success.

Example: *"I'm spending a point of Willpower," Jackie says, casting the dice. That's one success, no matter how they roll. Even if they fall badly, Painted Horse won't botch this performance... and if they fall WELL, he could score a serious coup.*

Multiple Successes and Degrees of Success

A single success means you succeeded decently: you found what you were looking for, your concert went okay, you got that cute guy's number even though he didn't seem too interested, whatever. However,as the ***Degrees of Success chart*** shows **(see p. 387)**, there are different *levels* of success. By exceeding the minimum degree of success, your character can be truly memorable... not simply getting by, but nailing the game with style.

Examples: *Six successes later, Malcolm has an eager new associate and friend. Jennifer, despite all odds, sneaks in and out of the network honcho's house with enough dirt to destroy his career. Painted Horse pleases the spirits, his audience, and most of all himself when he turns that hoop dance into a five-success gig. As for Spider and Jinx, better luck next time – and there WILL, of course, be a next time...*

A great roll, with several successes, makes a huge difference in story terms. Whereas that one success means an acceptable win, four successes mean serious victory. That's the flipside of a botch: just as you can screw up miserably, you can also rock the world with triumph.

And really... isn't that what magick's all about?

2014

Chapter Nine: Dramatic Systems

The evidence all points to the fact that we occupy not a well-mannered clockwork universe but a destructive, violent, and hostile zoo... the universe wants to kill us all.

– Neil deGrasse Tyson, *Death by Black Hole*

Six of Swords

Associations: *Passage; journey; travel; objectivity; blockage; obstacles; consideration of the whole...*

Near nightfall, Tanith stumbled onto the settlement, more by accident than by navigation. One minute, it seemed as though she was moving along the stream; the next, her canoe was caught in some kind of barrier of branches and there were women armed with everything from butcher knives to a baseball bat standing on the banks on either side of her.

Tanith raised her empty hands in greeting. One of the women came forward and asked her in Portuguese what she wanted. Thankful for the many language lessons she had endured, Tanith assured them she was not their enemy. "Eu sou medico," she told them: I'm a doctor. Carefully, she held up her medical kit and the herbal medicine bag she carried everywhere. One suspicious woman – scarred and burly, with eyes that had seen firsthand how awful men could be – set aside her baseball bat and took the bags from Tanith. Examined them. Nodded to the others, finally.

Weapons lowered, the women offered wary welcomes to their visitor.

Their caution, Tanith realized, was warranted. Survivors of massacres at Comdoro, Santarém, and elsewhere, they had no reason to welcome strangers. Murder-gangs and cartel enforcers had taken everything they'd possessed except for this hidden sanctuary. She hoped they had a few guns among them. If the killers found this place as well, the women would need more than knives and clubs.

And now? If nothing else, they looked as though they could use a doctor.

The raw scream from beyond the trees ran shivers up Tanith's sweaty back. The other women looked in the direction of that cry. "Ela está em trabalho de parto, certo?" asked Tanith: She is in labor, yes?

Burly-scar nodded, their apparent leader.

Tanith pointed to her medicine gear. "Eu sou uma obstetriz. Eu posso ajudá-la:" I'm a midwife. I can help her. Tanith's instincts, as usual, had been correct. She'd been needed here.

A few minutes later, after soft but pointed arguments in Portuguese, she stepped into the blood-thickened air of a handmade hut. Eyes adjusting from the sunlight to the dim, Tanith noted the young woman swollen with ripe pregnancy, the slick sweat; the tired faces of her friends as they held her down and tried to soothe her pain. "Aqui – por favor, me deixe entrar. Eu sou médica," she said, uncapping her canteen and washing her hands, then dousing them with antiseptic. Here – please let me in. I'm a doctor.

Inside the birth canal, the child had twisted and lodged. Thank you, Mother, Tanith prayed silently. A few more minutes longer, and… best not to think of that. She laid her hands on the young mother's belly, closed her eyes, and focused herself. Massaged. Began to chant. To sing. To work the baby free…

In the name of all mothers, Tanith prayed. And in the name of them all, the Mother answered…

Selling the Drama

When seconds count and success or disaster hangs upon the roll of 10-sided dice, rules provide foundations for your tale. As we saw in the previous chapter, the core of those rules is very simple: roll one d10 for every dot in your dice pool, to equal or beat the difficulty of your task.

Certain tasks, however, are more complex than others. In such situations – stepping sideways into the Otherworlds, facing off with spirit entities, ducking bursts of machine gun fire, and so on – simplicity gives way to detail. And so, this chapter provides a framework for such dramatic situations – for those times when a simple die roll doesn't tell the whole story.

In all cases, the following dramatic systems employ the basic die-roll foundation. And yes – the Golden Rule still applies here as well. This chapter's rules exist to help keep your story moving. If they bog things down, the Storyteller should feel free to simply say, "*Never mind – you succeed*" or "*Go ahead – roll, but your chances of doing that are practically nonexistent.*" Yes, rules are important, especially when your character's life is on the line. When using those rules, though, favor description over dice. Play out the seduction; describe the firefight; imagine the sweat and gunsmoke – the pain of injury and the relief of a job well done.

Here, as before, *drama* is more important than *systems*. Sell that drama and make your story sing.

Where the Rules Are

Given the vast number of rules and options in this chapter, we've broken these ***Dramatic Systems*** into the following sections:

- **Part I: Initiative and Movement** (pp. 399-401) shows you the different ways in which time, space, and activities break down within the game setting.
- **Part II: Dramatic Feats** (pp. 401-405) covers the wide range of things a character can do without magick.
- **Part III: Health and Injury** (pp. 406-409) deals with the systems for injury and healing.
- **Part IV: Combat** (pp. 409-457) features the many ways in which characters can hurt one another, including magickal combat, spirit combat, close combat, dirty fighting, martial arts, Do, mage duels, and the many environmental hazards associated with combat and other forms of dangerous living. This section also features an extensive array of associated charts, beginning on (p. 445).

Metric Conversions

Because **Mage** is international – and **Mage** fans are even more so! – the following conversions can help players translate the between American system of measurements and the metric system.

Distance

1 foot = .3 meters/ 30 centimeters
1 yard = .91 meters
1 meter = 3.28 feet/ 1.1 yards
1 kilometer = .6 miles
1 mile = 1.6 kilometers

Weight

1 ounce = 28 grams
1 pound = .45 kilograms
1 kilogram = 28 ounces/ 2.2 pounds
1 ton = .9 megagrams (metric tons)
1 metric ton = 1.1 tons

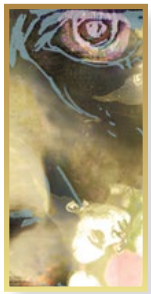
Liquid Volume

1 ounce = 30 milliliters
1 pint = .47 liters
1 quart = .95 liters
1 liter = 1.06 quarts/ .26 gallons
1 gallon = 3.8 liters

- **Part V: The Technological World** (pp. 458-464) deals with vehicles, machines, and invention and repairs.
- **Part VI: The Digital Web** (pp. 465-473) reveals the basic systems involved in tackling the living aspect of the Internet.
- **Part VII: The Otherworlds** (pp.474-485) revisits the many strange environments described in **Chapter Four**, including the optional systems for the Avatar Storm.
- **Part VIII: Umbrood Spirit Entities** (pp. 485-495) wraps up the chapter with a look at the weird creatures on the other side of the Gauntlet.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the following rules should be considered the officially definitive systems for **Mage**. Although your Storyteller may feel free to use older versions of the rules (or house rules, of course), a combination of old rules and new ones might be confusing and unbalancing to your game.

Part I: Initiative and Movement



Mages have a way of turning time and space into enigmatic pretzels. Even so, it's a good idea to go over the basic rules of timing and activity before exploring the various methods for breaking heads, hearts, and the laws of physics. The intervals of game time and story time can be found under ***Turns, Scenes, and Stories*** in **Chapter Eight** (pp. 384-385), and this chapter shows you what you can *do* within those times.

Action Turns

When action erupts, each activity becomes a distinct and concentrated moment, and its importance becomes obvious only after the action ends. In *The Matrix*, that sense of bullet time captures the strange sense of calm-amidst-chaos... a sense mages understand all too well, especially those familiar with the Sphere of Time.

In game terms, dramatic moments become *action turns* – those short units of time described in **Chapter Eight** that reflect between three and 10 seconds in your character's life. Although extended tasks – hacking, seductions, rituals, and so on – may use turns that last for minutes or even hours, situations in which the "clock is ticking" employ action turns.

During those action turns – especially the ones that cover combat situations – the Storyteller can break things down into three stages:

- **Stage One: Initiative**, in which the various players determine who acts in which order. (See below.)
- **Stage Two: Action**, during which everyone rolls dice and figures out what's happening; and...
- **Stage Three: Resolution**, in which the results of those die rolls make themselves known. Damage gets figured. Success or failure plays out through character activities. And then the stage gets set for the next turn, where it all begins again.

For combat-based situations, see the section of that name. For non-combat situations, check ***Dramatic Feats***, below. And for details about time, see the previous chapter.

Initiative and Initiative Ratings

In real life, such moments feel chaotic; games, though, demand a bit more order. And so, when the action starts, each player (including the Storyteller) rolls *initiative* for his or her character. Those with high initiatives act first, while the others scramble to catch up.

To find your initiative, roll one die and then add it to your character's *initiative rating*: his Dexterity + Wits. The character with the highest initiative acts first, the second highest goes next, and so on down the line. The Storyteller handles initiative for each of her characters too, and she might decide – for simplicity's sake – to have them all act on the same initiative.

Roll Once, or Once Per Turn?

You can go one of two ways with initiative: either rolling a new initiative every turn, or else rolling a single initiative at the beginning of an action scene and then sticking with that order until that scene ends. The first approach allows characters to catch up with one another or fall behind thanks to circumstances; the second option keeps the action quick and simple.

Either option works, and both have advantages and disadvantages. Option one reflects the unpredictable nature of action scenes, but it slows gameplay down. Option two keeps things moving, but one bad initiative roll can put you at a disadvantage for the entire scene.

Ultimately, your troupe should decide which options works best... and do so before the action starts. Don't switch between those options in the middle of a scene. Pick one and stick with it.

Ties on the die roll go to the player with the highest initiative rating; if the initiative ratings are also tied, then favor the character with the highest Wits. If the Wits ratings are also tied, favor the character with the highest Dexterity. In story terms, both characters act simultaneously, and the effects of their actions hit home at the same time.

Automatic Feats

Once you've figured out who's doing what and when they're doing it, you'll generally want to figure out whether or not they succeed at doing it. Most of this chapter covers the many situations in which you'll probably roll for success or failure. Certain *automatic feats*, though, require no rolls. Although you'll generally have to spend an action to perform such activities, you won't need to roll for them unless there's some sort of complication involved, like trying to run across ice or grab a key ring that has slipped deep into your pocket... just when you need to get into your car or apartment *RIGHT THIS SECOND*.

When there's nothing vital on the line, *most* activities are essentially automatic actions. Malcolm doesn't need to make a roll every time he fills out a form or makes a deal – that's just what he does. But when the difference between success and failure impacts the story, the die rolls matter. Under calm circumstances, you can just use the ***automatic success rule*** referred to in the previous chapter. Save the rolls and rules for tasks with potentially dramatic consequences.

Automatic or not, each of the following tasks takes an action. A player who wants to have his character take more than one action at time needs to divide his attention between them – see ***Doing Several Things at Once***, below.

Common automatic feats include:

- **Getting to Your Feet:** Under normal circumstances, you don't need to roll dice in order to get up from a chair or the floor. Such actions require rolls only if someone's trying to stop your character from getting up or when he's struggling with hazards like ice, oil, or some similar impediment.

- **Normal Movement:** Under most circumstances, your character can get around without needing to make a roll. As with the other situations, those rolls come in only when there's some hazard or ticking clock involved. For movement rates, see below.

- **Normal Speech, Writing, or Texting:** Unless you're trying to accomplish something vital with your words, it doesn't take much time, or a roll, to make a short statement or share a brief exchange. Long speeches or debates, of course, *do* take time – you can't deliver a stirring address about the wonders of Taoist alchemy in a few seconds – and typing or texting take more time than speaking. Under certain circumstances, you may need to make a roll to speak, text, or type something complicated while under stress... especially if you're trying to deal with autocorrect while texting a banishment ritual to a friend who's under attack.

- **Grabbing Tools or Weapons:** Mages tend to keep the tools of their Arts within easy reach, especially if they know they're going into hostile situations. Thus, certain instruments – guns, knives, mummified pigeon feet on a chain, and so forth – can usually be grabbed within a turn and without a roll.

Certain tools and weapons, though, are more difficult and clumsy to employ: cauldrons, laptops, a set of dice in a bag that's buried at the bottom of your backpack... stuff like that. In that case, the action used to dig them out or put them to use might take more than three to 10 seconds. A pistol, for example, is quick to draw and easy to employ, whereas a .30 caliber machine gun is not. Certain instruments take time to use. Sure, you can drink a potion or point a wand within seconds, but typing out a custom virus script or inscribing the Seventh and Last Pentacle of the Sun will take quite a bit longer, and it will probably require a roll to assure that you don't screw up the process.

To pull out an instrument or weapon and use it within the same turn, you've got to split your dice pool between actions. Again, see ***Doing Several Things at Once***.

- **Starting a Vehicle:** It doesn't take a roll, or much time, to start up the average car. Starting a tank or airplane, of course, is another matter – it might take several minutes to get all the essential systems online. Traveling, likewise, doesn't usually require rolling dice unless there's some complication involved – driving on icy roads, having an aerial dogfight, trying to outrun a pack of *Road Warrior* rejects, that sort of thing. For such situations, see ***Dramatic Feats***, ***Environmental Hazards***, and ***Vehicle Systems***, all later in this chapter.

- **Delaying Your Action:** If you want your character to hold off on an action until other characters have acted, simply declare, "*I yield this action until later.*" By yielding, or delaying, an action, you save your character's activity up until the end of the turn. If you don't use a delayed action within that turn, however, then your character doesn't act that turn. And if everyone yields his or her action that turn, then no one goes at all.

Doing Several Things at Once

In the heat of the moment, characters often try to perform several tasks at the same time. Doing so, however, means that they have to divide their attention between them. In game terms, this requires either ***Multiple Actions*** (described in Chapter Eight, p. 388-389), or else the use of a Time 3 Effect that lets you move faster than usual.

Movement

Mages get around – on foot, in cars, on wings and jetpacks and motorcycles and whatever other methods they manage to employ. The higher-level Correspondence Sphere magicks even let them step from place to place without passing through the intervening distance; that's pretty unusual, though, and it's covered in the following chapter.

Movement Rates

Under most circumstances, an average human being can walk, jog, or run at the rate below. More information about Climbing can be found in the ***Dramatic Feats*** section.

Move	Distance per Turn
Walk	7 yards
Jog	12 + Dexterity yards
Run	20 + (3 x Dexterity) yards
Swim	8 + Dexterity (unskilled)/ 12 + Dexterity (skilled) yards
Fly	10 to 20 yards
Climb	10 feet (3.3 yards) per success normally; 15-20 feet under ideal conditions; 5 feet per success under poor conditions.

Most times, the Awakened move around more or less the way we all do: on foot or in vehicles that cover the space between Point A and Point B.

When your character walks, runs, swims, or flies, the ***Movement Rates chart*** tells you more or less how far she'll move within a single turn. She can move up to half of her normal running speed in a single turn and still act without taking a penalty; if she moves more than that, she'll have to reduce her dice pool for that second action by one die for every yard she moves.

Generally, a character can move at full speed for a minute or two (roughly 10 turns) for every point of Stamina she possesses. Characters who have reached the Injured Health Level or lower move at half their normal rate. High-intensity movement (jumping, swimming, flat-out running) can cut the normal movement duration by half or even more than that if she's also dodging gunfire, swimming through heavy waves, or outrunning the hounds of hell. To push beyond such limits, you'll often have to roll either your character's Stamina or Willpower – whichever one is greater. Botch that roll, and your mage's body immediately gives up, trips, or otherwise comes to a screeching halt.

For rules dealing with vehicles, see ***Vehicle Systems*** (pp. 458-462).

Part II: Dramatic Feats

Drama means "to perform." Thus, whenever possible, your character's actions can become opportunities for roleplaying performances. At those times, though, when you can't act out your character's deeds – when he's more eloquent than you, when she's much stronger than you, when someone pulls steel or hops on a wyvern's back – then it's time for dice to help tell the tale.

The following *dramatic feats* reflect tasks that demand physical, social, or mental acumen. As you describe what your character's doing in the story, check the ***Dramatic Feats chart*** below, add the appropriate Traits together, and then roll against the listed difficulty. In certain cases, that roll might be *extended* or *resisted*, as per the previous chapter; for such situations, several rolls depict the ongoing effort and its eventual failure or success.

As the ***Degrees of Success*** chart in **Chapter Eight** (p. 387) reveals, you can succeed by a bare margin, do well, or knock the ball out of the park, depending on the number of successes you roll for a given feat. Especially with regards to physical feats, acts of art and science, or social occasions, the difference between a marginal success and extreme victory can have huge effects on the story's direction and the characters involved. A single success during a facedown, for example, could result in a scowl and a grudging step aside, but a five-success victory could scare your rival so badly that he cowers, bolts, and avoids you afterward.

The ***Dramatic Feats chart*** features several columns:

- **Action** tells you what the character's doing.
- **Traits** show you which game Traits to use in your dice pool.
- **Difficulty** provides a base difficulty for the task. Depending on circumstances, this number could go up or down.
- **Description** tells you which type of roll to use. If the task involves some additional Traits or elements, you'll find them in this column too.
- Many tasks also feature **Notes**, indicated by a number, that show options or exceptions to the listed roll. Those notes can be found on the page following that chart.

The ***Dramatic Feats chart*** doesn't cover every potential action, of course, but it'll give you something to work with as your heroes move through the tale. If you need to puzzle out some task that's not listed on the chart, just find a similar feat on the chart and then use that as a guide to your roll and difficulty.

Divided into several sections, the chart reveals different sorts of feats and their associated rolls...

Physical Feats

When you can't climb a wall, the dice can climb it for you. This section covers feats of strength, endurance, and agility. Most of them are obvious; **Demolition**, however, reflects smashing things with raw strength (see also *Bustin' Stuff*, p. 439-440). **Flow-Arts** involves using some sort of graceful skill-toy (hoops, juggling, poi-spinning, staff-spinning, etc.), and a **Resisting** character tries to push through physical, mental, or emotional trauma (torture, ordeals, depression, illness, and so forth) without giving in to pain or fatigue.

Art and Science

The Art and Science section helps your character design and perform works of skilled creativity. In many cases, you can simply narrate or roleplay such creations; in high-stakes situations, though – say, trying to impress a tough audience, repair a broken time machine, or cast a spell through a ritual dance – then a successful roll or two can resolve the task at hand.

On the chart, **Design** reflects the research and brainstorming stage, **Computer** represents typical information technology tasks, and **Craftwork** represents the physical act of making something new (sculpting, coding, wiring, painting, forging, etc.); depending on what you're trying to accomplish, this could take minutes, hours, days or more. **Evaluation** comes into play when you're trying to judge someone else's work, **Hacking** involves breaking into a computerized system, and **Gamesmanship** reflects contests of strategy and skill – chess, cars, riddle contests, and so on. **Invention** represents the trial-and-error process involved in creative technology; **Jury-Rigging** involves quick fixes when technology fails. **Performance** reflects artistic activity (dancing, singing, telling jokes, and so forth), **Programming** deals with setting or changing commands in a data-based system, and **Surfing** represents general computer-based Internet activity. **Repair** covers maintenance and fix-it work, and **Research** covers the time and effort involved in finding essential data for the project you're working on at the time. **Understanding**, meanwhile, represents the comprehension of mysteries, riddles, or Things Man Was Not Meant to Know; in such situations, it may be better to score a moderate degree of success than to, perhaps, understand the full implications of what you're examining. Especially in the Awakened world, such understanding could drive a sane man mad... See ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***, under ***Health and Injury***, (p. 407).

For additional systems details about technology, craftwork, and other related subjects, see the various sections under ***Part V: The Technological World***.

Social Occasions and Intrigue

Crafty mages know their way around the social jungle. In the shadows of that jungle, folks pass around codes and gossip and circulate physical and emotional poisons. So when your mage wants to intimidate a rival, impress a client, or score some company for the night, the following tasks and rolls come into play.

In game terms, **Cryptography** refers to making or cracking codes – an activity that usually demands specialized knowledge before you can even consider doing it. **Deception** reveals how well you tell or spot a lie, and **Eloquence** represents impressive speeches and verbal dexterity. A **Facedown** determines contests of social dominance, whereas a **Fake-Out** determines the success or failure of attempted misdirection. **Gossip** plants rumors and spreads slander; **Impressing** wins another person's favor. **Interpreting** helps you puzzle out language or behavior you don't easily understand, and **Interrogation** helps you obtain info from parties who'd rather not share it with you. **Poisoning** lets you slip dangerous substances into drinks, food, or other vectors. **Seduction** reflects emotional manipulation (sexual or otherwise); **Spotting (a) Sneak** helps catch people in the act of trying to get past you. **Spotting (the) Supernatural** helps you notice mystic and paranormal phenomena like auras or Resonance. Finally, the brutal art of **Torture** reflects the effective implementation of enhanced interrogation and artistic excruciation – loathsome but unfortunately popular activities in the age of terror wars.

Social activities work best when you combine roleplaying and imaginative descriptions with a die roll or two to reflect the things you can't play out in person. In many cases, these rolls represent minutes' or hours' worth of effort – even among the Awakened, the ability to hash out a code off the cuff or make someone look bad within seconds is rare. Many social-based rolls involve *resisted actions* (again, see the previous chapter) in order to overcome the target's objections. In certain cases, though, the *automatic success rule* (once again, see **Chapter Eight**) ought to eliminate the die roll altogether; after all, a mage with eight dots in his combined Appearance + Seduction pool can seduce most people simply by looking their way.

Transportation

Especially in the 21st century, folks ride things in order to get from place to place. If you happen to be driving, piloting, flying a broom, or riding a beast, the following rolls might come into play.

Driving represents motorized vehicle handling, though certain vehicles (trucks, motorcycles, etc.) may require at least two or three dots in Drive. **Evasion** allows a person to shake pursuit while on foot or in a vehicle. **Flight** represents object-assisted flying (carpets, jetpacks, etc.), wings, or levitation. **Piloting** is essentially driving, but with tricky and specialized aircraft controls. **Pursuit** lets you chase someone, **Riding** reflects your ability to manage a live mount, and **Sailing** represents your ability to handle a water-going vehicle.

Especially large or complex vehicles, of course, are beyond a single person's ability. One guy can't run a starship or aircraft carrier by himself! In this case, the related Ability Trait combined with a Mental Attribute lets you know how that vehicle is controlled, and may help you tell other people how to manage such a craft. In many cases, however, a character needs a specific Trait or specialty before she has the slightest idea how to operate a given type of vehicle. Your ability to handle a motorboat won't tell you either Jack or Shit when you reach an ocean liner's bridge!

For the rules connected to the vehicles themselves, see ***Vehicles Systems*** (pp. 458-462).

Dramatic Feats

Action	Traits	Difficulty	Description
		Physical Feats	
Chase	Dexterity + Athletics	6	Resisted & Extended
Climbing	Dexterity + Athletics	(varies) [#1]	Extended; 1 success = 5 feet
Demolition	Strength + Athletics	(varies)	Extended; 1 roll per strike
Flow-Arts	Dexterity + Athletics	5-9	Standard; 1 roll per each performance
Foraging	Perception + Survival	7-9	Extended; 1 roll = 2-5 hours
Hunting	Perception + Survival [#2]	7-9	Extended; 1 roll = 1-3 hours
Jumping	Strength	3	Standard up: 2'/ success, across: 4'/ success
Lifting	Strength or Willpower	(varies) see Feats of Strength chart	
Resisting	Willpower or Stamina	+ 3 (varies)	Standard or Resisted; see ***Torture***
Sneaking	Dexterity + Stealth	[#3]	Standard; see ***Spotting Sneak***
Swimming	Stamina + Athletics or Swimming	(varies)	Extended; 1 success = 10 minutes; for speed, see ***Movement Rates***
		Art and Science	
Computer	Intelligence + Computers	(varies)	Standard or Extended
Craftwork	Dexterity + Crafts [#4]	(varies)	Extended; 1 roll = a day, week, or month, depending on task
Design	Intelligence + Crafts [#4]	(varies)	Extended
Evaluation	Perception + Art or Crafts	(varies)	Standard
Gamesmanship	Perception + Subterfuge [#5]	(varies)	Resisted
Hacking	Intelligence or Wits + Computer	[#6]	Extended & Resisted
Invention	Intelligence + Craft or Technology	(varies)	Extended
Jury-Rigging	Wits + Technology	(varies)	Standard
Performance	Manipulation + Art [#7]	(varies)	Standard
Programming	Intelligence + Computer	[#6]	Extended
Repair	Intelligence + Technology	(varies)	Extended
Research	Intelligence + Research [#8]	[#9]	Extended
Surfing	Perception + Computer	[#9]	Extended
Understanding	Intelligence + Enigmas or Esoterica	(varies)	Standard

Dramatic Feats (Continued)

Social Occasions and Intrigue

Cryptography	Intelligence + Knowledge [#10]	8	Extended [#10]
Deception [#11]	Manipulation + Subterfuge	[#12]	Resisted
Eloquence [#11]	Charisma + Expression	7	Standard
Facedown [#11]	Charisma + Intimidation	8	Resisted, target's Willpower
Fake-Out [#11]	Manipulation + Streetwise	[#12]	Standard
Gossip [#11]	Manipulation + Subterfuge	7	Standard
Impressing [#11]	Charisma + Etiquette	(varies)	Standard
Interpreting	Perception + Empathy	(varies)	Standard
Interrogation [#11]	Manipulation + Intimidation	6	Resisted, target's Willpower
Poisoning	Dexterity + Streetwise	[#12]	Standard
Seduction [#11]	Manipulation + Subterfuge or Seduction	[#12]	Resisted, target's Willpower
Spotting Sneak	Perception + Stealth	8	Resisted; see ***Sneaking***
Spotting Supernatural	Perception + Awareness	(varies)	Standard
Torture [#11]	Manipulation + Torture	6	Resisted; see ***Resisting*** [#13]

Transportation

Driving	Dexterity + Drive	[#14]	Standard
Evasion	Dexterity + transport method	[#14]	Resisted [#15]
Flight	Dexterity + Flying or Jetpack	[#14]	Standard
Piloting	Dexterity or Wits + Pilot	[#14]	Standard
Pursuit	Dexterity + transport method	[#14]	Resisted [#16]; see ***Evasion***
Riding	Dexterity + Riding	[#14]	Standard
Sailing	Wits + Crafts (Seamanship)	[#14]	Standard

Notes

#1 = A variable difficulty is typically 6, but it may go up or down depending on circumstances.

#2 = Intelligence can replace Perception, to reflect cunning.

#3 = Watcher's Perception + Awareness; could also be set by conditions – higher for light or open space, lower for darkness or cover.

#4 = *Craft* reflects the appropriate Trait; could also be Art or a Knowledge.

#5 = Or a Knowledge Trait related to the game. Could also be Manipulation + Intimidation (to bluff); Perception + Intuition (to read opponent); or Intelligence + Enigmas (to work out puzzle).

#6 = Depends upon system being hacked; for details, see extended computer rules in **The Book of Secrets**.

Dramatic Feats (Continued)

#7 = Manipulation could be replaced by Dexterity, Stamina, Charisma, or Appearance, depending on the type of performance. Expression, Intimidation, or Seduction could be used to compensate for lack of skill.

#8 = Research can be replaced by Streetwise (for dirt), Etiquette (high society), Computer (for computer searches), or other appropriate Knowledge Traits (Esoterica, Government, Investigation, etc.).

#9 = Depends on how accessible the information is: 4 = widely available, 6 = normally accessible, 8 = hard to find, 9 + threshold = secret, classified, or assumed lost.

#10 = *Knowledge* reflects the Trait necessary to encode or decode the information. Typical code Traits include Esoterica (appropriate specialty), Linguistics (appropriate language), Science (appropriate discipline), or other fields. To crack a code without the appropriate information, you might use Computer (to access databases) at +3 difficulty and twice the normal successes needed; cracking code when you *do* have the information speeds the process considerably. Creating or cracking complex codes is an extended activity, with each roll reflecting one day, week, or month, depending on the code's complexity. Many modern ciphers cannot be decoded *without* computers, and take days or weeks to unravel even then.

#11 = Any Social Trait works; Charisma reflects force of personality, Manipulation is obvious, and Appearance lets you use beauty to your advantage.

#12 = Difficulty is observer's Wits + Subterfuge.

#13 = Torturer makes one roll per turn. Each scene of mental torture costs the victim one point of temporary Willpower. Each scene of physical torture costs the victim one health level of bashing or lethal damage (depends upon method; intense torment inflicts two health levels per scene). Intense or lethal torture reduces tormenter's difficulty by -2. Botched roll gets false information, breaks target's mind, or possibly kills target.

#14 = Difficulties depend upon travel conditions, from 3 or 4 in calm conditions to 9 + threshold under hazardous conditions.

#15 = Target may use Dexterity + Stealth on foot (Wits + Stealth to duck behind cover). Pursuer's roll is resisted with Perception + Subterfuge, and the pursuers must win roll in order to find target.

#16 = Pursuer tries to equal or exceed target's successes; target tries to evade pursuer. Target begins with a head start between one and four successes. (One success = 2 yards on foot, 10 yards in cars, 50 yards in large vehicles). Each success by pursuer eliminates one success from the target. If pursuer matches or exceeds target's successes, pursuer catches up; if target more than doubles pursuer's successes, target escapes.

Feats of Strength

Dice Pool	Feat	Lift
1	Crush a soda can	40 lbs.
2	Break a chair	100 lbs.
3	Bust down a wooden door	250lbs
4	Break a 2 x 4	400 lbs.
5	Smash open a metal fire door	650 lbs.
6	Throw a motorcycle	800 lbs.
7	Flip a small car	900 lbs.
8	Snap a lead pipe	1000 lbs.
9	Punch through a cement wall	1200 lbs.
10	Tear open a steel drum	1500 lbs.
11	Punch through 1" of sheet metal	2000 lbs.
12	Snap a streetlight post	3000 lbs.
13	Throw a sedan	4000 lbs.
14	Toss an SUV	5000 lbs.
15	Hurl a pickup truck	6000 lbs.

Part III: Health and Injury

Mages face a dangerous world. Beyond the common violence of the mortal streets, their internecine politics, reality-bending madness, and occasional bouts of pure brutality, it's easy to get hurt and damn near as easy to die. In a world apparently defined by monsters, a mage must keep her head, be clever, and avoid bloodshed as often as possible. But because that's often *not* possible, we have the Health Trait, which reflects the space between perfectly healthy and going Into The Light.

As noted under the ***Health*** Trait entry in **Chapter Six**, this Trait reflects your character's condition. As injuries wear it down, you pencil certain marks along the Health Chart to track its current state. Slash marks (/) designate *bashing damage*, Xs designate *lethal damage*, and asterisks (*) designate *aggravated damage*. Each type reflects a different type of harm. As your Trait goes down, your dice pools go down as well. Magick and medicine, fortunately, can repair such injuries. Even so, mages are fragile when compared to the rest of the Night-Folk. Things a werewolf could laugh off can easily kill a mage.

Types of Injury

Again as noted under ***Health*** (and, for clarity, as reiterated in the entry for ***Combat***), different attacks and hazards cause different sorts of injuries. Detailed below, the three types of damage reflect both the initial trauma and the time and effort required to heal it.

Bashing Damage

A consequence of painful but survivable trauma, bashing damage represents the effects of blunt impact, short falls, psychic attacks, fistfight injuries, knockout gas, minor illness, most types of drugs, and other pains that the average person might walk away from. Story-wise, bashing damage comes across as bloody noses, bruises, aching joints, blurry vision, and so forth. It's *possible* to die from bashing damage, but it's not likely.

Most characters can at least try to *soak* bashing damage – that is, absorb it with the Stamina Trait. The combat section covers the rules for soaking damage; for now, just remember that a person with a high Stamina can take a lot of bashing-level punishment.

Still, there *are* limits. When bashing damage takes a character to the Incapacitated level on the Health chart, that character's in trouble. Although she can still try to soak incoming bashing damage with her Stamina, the next level of bashing damage – typically marked with a slash – gets noted at the top of the Health chart with an X. As the character takes even more bashing damage, those Xs go further down the chart. If her chart gets filled with Xs from top to bottom, then the next level of any kind of damage kills her. So yes – although it's not easy, you *can* punch and kick a character to death.

Healing Damage

Health Level	***Recovery Time****
Bashing Damage	
Bruised to Wounded	One hour
Mauled	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	12 hours
Lethal and Aggravated Damage	
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Two months
Crippled	Three months
Incapacitated	Five months

** Recovery times cumulative; see **Recovery**, below.*

The Health Chart

Health Levels	**Dice Pool Penalty***	**Movement Penalty**
Bruised	0	Minor pain and swelling; he's banged up but otherwise fine.
Hurt	-1	Cuts, bruises, aches, perhaps bleeding but no major impairment.
Injured	-1	Minor, painful injuries limit the character to half his normal movement.
Wounded	-2	Notable injuries handicap him; the character can't run but may still walk.
Mauled	-2	Significant internal and external damage; character can hobble around (three yards/ turn) but not move normally.
Crippled	-5	Catastrophic injuries; character can only crawl (one yard/ turn).
Incapacitated	N/A	Character is unconscious from pain and trauma; no movement possible.
Dead	N/A	Another soul greets the Great Mystery.

** Does not affect Avatar, soak, or Arete rolls.*

Characters heal more quickly from bashing damage than they do from other types. For details, see ***Healing Damage*** (pp. 408-409) and the ***Healing Damage chart*** nearby.

Lethal Damage

Folks can walk away from a punch in the face; a knife in the gut, though, is another story. Lethal damage depicts the harm dealt out by guns, blades, long falls, sharp impacts, electrical burns, puncture wounds, deadly poisons, fatal diseases, and other harbingers of mortality. With potential exceptions for the ***Cinematic Damage*** option (see p. 412), the average character *cannot* soak lethal damage. This type is likely to be the death of him.

Again, note each level of lethal damage with an X on the Health chart. Every level reflects a greater degree of harm. Such injuries take longer to heal as well, and the character's condition may deteriorate unless she receives medical care – a successful Intelligence + Medicine roll – in order to stabilize that trauma.

At all levels below Hurt, untreated lethal wounds grow one level worse each day. A character at Wounded, for example, drops to Mauled the next day, Crippled the day after that, and Incapacitated the day after that until her injuries are stabilized. If and when lethal damage drops a character below Incapacitated, she should start picking out a harp or a pitchfork – she's done.

When treated with anything less than Life Sphere magick, lethal damage takes a while to heal. The ***Healing Damage chart*** above reveals just how much longer it takes to snap back from lethal harm than it does to recover from bashing damage. At the Storyteller's option, lethal injuries that bring a character to Mauled, Crippled, or Incapacitated may leave lasting scars even after the Health chart has recovered those lost health levels.

Aggravated Damage

"Agg damage" represents the most horrific injuries a person can sustain: fire, acid, virulent toxins, vampire fangs, radiation, explosions, and similar physical atrocities. On a metaphysical level, such damage tears apart the Pattern that binds a living thing together... and so, it follows that Life 3 and Entropy 4 Effects inflict aggravated damage by unweaving that Pattern. Thankfully, Life 3 can also reweave a damaged Pattern; such treatment demands vulgar magick and a point of Quintessence per health level healed, but it's an improvement over dying.

Like lethal damage, aggravated damage cannot be soaked by most physical beings. Certain types of protection – armor plating, substances that have been hardened with Matter and Prime magick, or incredibly dense materials like lead vaults or steel bulkheads – can resist aggravated damage, but normal flesh cannot. Only time and magick can heal such harm; medical care facilitates long-term treatment but can't patch it up with short-term First Aid. (See the ***Patch 'Em Up*** option sidebar.)

In all other regards, treat aggravated damage as lethal damage. Marked with an asterisk, it deteriorates like lethal damage, takes a long time to heal, and must be stabilized if the injured character plans to survive major injury.

Psychic Trauma

In a mage's world, you can suffer torment without sustaining a scratch. Such *psychic trauma* comes from mental attacks, torture, abominable tomes, and emotional shocks that cause psychosomatic pain. If normal injury represents assaults upon the flesh, then psychic trauma reflects assaults upon the

Optional Rule: Things Man Was Not Meant to Know

Mages are a tough-headed lot. It's their trade, after all, to unlock doors that few folk even recognize. Still, certain mysteries are best left undiscovered. As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller may declare that a character has seen or understood too much.

Faced with situations or enigmas too horrible or strange to contemplate, a Storyteller can call for a Willpower roll on the part of the characters involved. Again, mages are used to such things, so while a normal mortal might have to roll against difficulty 8 or 9 when he confronts cosmic abominations, a mage would roll against difficulty 6 or 7, maybe less. *Some* mysteries or acts remain so catastrophic to one's sanity that even the mage needs at least one success at difficulty 8 or 9, while the mortal must score three successes or more against that higher difficulty. Such situations should be *quite* rare. If they didn't exist, however, then Marauders and Nephandi would be far less frightening... and far less *numerous*.

A failed Willpower roll in such confrontations might force a character to pass out (regardless of gender), freeze in horrified fascination, or flee. Afterward, that character suffers nightmares, shakes, or creeping obsessions. If the Willpower roll was simply failed, the effects will soon fade. If a mage's player botched that roll, however, those effects might later lead to a Psychological Flaw, a horrific Seeking, or perhaps even Quiet once the mage has had time to fully process the implications of his experience. (For Seekings, see **Chapter Seven**; for Quiet, see **Chapter Ten**; and for Flaws, again, see **Appendix II**.) A mortal, meanwhile, would certainly remain haunted by that experience and might go wildly or silently mad. **(See *Sanity Sinks* in the *Marauders* entry of Chapter Five, p. 242.)**

(It's worth noting that mages and their hardy companions remain immune to lycanthropic Delirium. Although a werewolf should scare the hell out of any intelligent mage, the greater effects of panic and delusion described in **Werewolf: the Apocalypse** don't count as Things Man Was Not Meant to Know.)

Again, this sort of thing shouldn't happen often. Given the influence of the Void, the Fallen, and the Mad, however, the threat of potential dementia can add sharpness to an Awakened Path.

consciousness or soul. Although it's uncommon in the mortal world, the Awakened face it with awful regularity.

In game terms, psychic trauma is bashing damage inflicted by the Mind Sphere. In this case, Willpower, not Stamina, offers a soak roll. Given the powerful will of most Awakened folks, psychic attacks tend to be extended and resisted rolls (see ***Dramatic Systems: Torture***) rather than immediate strikes like the ones that inflict physical harm. An unAwakened person, however, can suffer intense pain from psychic attacks; such assaults might knock out a character whose tormentor isn't even in sight. The Nephandi, Bata'a, and New World Order specialize in such attacks, and the Akashayana can use Do to apply pressure to a person's mind as well as to his limbs.

At the Storyteller's discretion, certain heavy-duty shocks might inflict a few dice of psychic trauma when characters face ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know***. (See that option's sidebar.) Although shock probably won't kill a character, the usual bashing damage rules apply to such situations, so it may be possible for a weak-willed person to die of horror or heartbreak. Alternately, an Incapacitated character might wind up mentally ill, tortured by Flaws that reflect his wounded mind. **(See *Flaws and Derangements* in Appendix II, pp. 646-650.)** Such things are rare, of course, but worth noting in the crazy world of magick.

Healing Damage

As the ***Healing Damage charts*** show, different types of damage heal differently. Those recovery times assume that an injured character has rest and basic medical attention; under especially good conditions – like state-of-the-art facilities, skilled medical therapy, and uninterrupted healing space – the listed healing times can be one or even (under the best circumstances) two categories better than the ones given on that chart.

Even so, medical treatment (that is, help from a character with Medicine 2 or better) is essential for bashing injuries of Wounded or worse, and for lethal or aggravated injuries of Injured or worse. Without such treatment, an injured character suffers more-or-less permanent impairment until someone with Life 3 or better has an opportunity to fix that damage with magick. Infections, deep-tissue trauma, torn ligaments, and other such problems require either Life magick or medical assistance. Time alone cannot heal severe injuries completely.

Recovery Time

The more injured you are, the longer it takes to recover from those injuries. Game-wise, the Recovery Times listed on the ***Healing Damage chart*** add up. If, for example, Jennifer Rollins takes three levels of lethal damage from that pit bull in **Chapter Eight**, she needs 11 days to recover from those bites and scratches. (One day + three days + one week = 11 days.)

Optional Rule: Patch 'Em Up

In high-intensity combat tales, your group might need to be patched up and sent back into action long before their injuries have truly healed. Under this *optional rule*, a character with Medicine 3 or higher, plus the appropriate medical gear, can heal a certain degree of lethal damage long enough for his patients to get back in the fight.

Rolling his Wits + Medicine against difficulty 8, the medic can patch up one level of lethal damage per success. Once the adventure ends, however, the injured character will need at least two months to recover from her injuries – double that for each time she gets patched up within a single story. (Two months the first time, four months the second, eight months the third, etc.) A patched-up character still operates at a minimum penalty of -1 to all rolls except Arete and soak – she's hurting bad. Characters with Staminas of 1 or 2 cannot be patched up this way, and a character who reaches Crippled or Incapacitated cannot be patched up at all. Patch-up attempts can be made once for every dot of Stamina that the injured character has; a Stamina 3 mage, for instance, can be patched up a maximum of three times before her injuries overwhelm the healer's skill.

A botched patch-up roll actually drops the patient's condition by one level. Also, each time a character gets patched up this way, the Storyteller may have the player make a Stamina roll at difficulty 8, with failure incurring a lasting Flaw as a result of her trauma. (See **Appendix II** for potential Flaws.) The character will, in any case, suffer long-term effects from such hasty measures unless Life magick gets used to fix the problem later.

As in real life, the patch 'em up option presents a quick fix with long-term consequences; still, it offers hope for desperate cabals who face deadly challenges yet lack access to Life 3 magick or healing items while also reflecting the utility of battlefield medicine when a long recuperation is not an option.

If she took two additional levels of bashing damage escaping the situation, then she'd need four hours to recover from the bashing damage, plus 11 days to heal from the dog's assault.

Magickal Healing

Life Sphere magick, of course, can fix such things like... well, like magic. The Technocracy has advanced medical treatments that can regenerate damaged tissues in hours or even minutes, and Life-specialized witches and sacred healers can lay on hands to get an injured person from death's door to full health in no time. Such feats are, of course, vulgar magick. Even in the most technological paradigm, people cannot immediately heal gunshot wounds.

As mentioned earlier, certain injuries are harder to heal than others. Even with Life 3 magick, a healer must spend one Quintessence point per health level in order to repair aggravated damage. The injured person's Pattern must be restored, and that task demands energies above and beyond anything that the average doctor or mage can muster.

Story-wise, injuries batter your character, often marking her with lasting scars. Magick can work wonders, true, but the pain of knife wounds, burns, and slashes from an enraged horror aren't simply forgotten once the Health Trait heals. Torn flesh, broken bones, twisted ligaments, and scarred organs hurt long after their initial injuries pass into memory. As a result, unlike the snarling creatures they so often face, the Awakened folk skirt the edges of a fight, all too aware of just how fragile they can be.

For additional details about healing magick, see the ***Medicine Work*** entry in the ***Practices*** section of **Chapter Ten** (p. 581).

Part IV: Combat

As Macklemore says, we live on the cusp of death, thinking it won't be us. That's especially true for the Awakened, whose intense insights and godlike powers bring them closer than most of us to the mysteries of their mortality. Whether or not he ever faces down a cyborg in a dark alley – or *is* that cyborg in the alley, facing something worse – a mage has a keen sense of life and death. When violence erupts, as it all too often does, its effects can't be ignored.

In games, combats have a tendency to devolve into die-rolling matches punctuated with rules checks and arguments. To keep the action moving and the drama high, emphasize descriptions over mechanics. Play up the sweat in a hero's eyes, the whine of ricochets, and the flying chips of plaster thrown around the room by a hail of bullets. The many options detailed below give you something more to do than make yet another attack roll and hear either "*You hit*" or "*You miss.*" Within the world of your chronicle, your mage can duck behind cars, throw ashes into someone's face, bust a bottle over some asshole's head, or reroute him into a wall without a single punch being thrown on your end of the fight.

Ready to Rumble

The following section breaks violence down into several categories:

- **Magick and Violence** addresses that eternal question: "*What happens if you fire a plasma disrupter cannon that supposedly hasn't been invented yet or slash somebody's throat to open a gate to Hell?*"
- **Ranged Combat** covers long-range assault techniques: guns, arrows, thrown objects, and so forth. To fight at a distance without magick, characters need to be able to see one another. You can't often hit what you can't really see.
- **Close Combat** deals with the up close and personal world of kicks to the head and beer bottles smashed across faces. Several subsections of that category deal with ***dirty fighting***, ***stunts***, ***martial arts***, and the mystic Art of ***Do*** – the Akashic Way of peace and carnage.
- **Magickal Duels** presents some guidelines for resolving wizardly disputes, including the infamous art of certámen.
- **Environmental Hazards** features many other ways to die: falls, fire, poison, and so on.
- **Combat System Charts**, where the essential information for modifiers, weapons, and maneuvers can be found.

Order of Battle

Whatever mayhem your characters face, combat plays out in ***action turns***, as described at the beginning of this chapter.

All players roll their ***initiative*** to see who acts when, and then handle those actions on a turn-by-turn basis. From that point, each combat turn gets divided into three phases:

- **Attack,** when you see whether or not attacks hit their targets;
- **Defense**, when you see whether or not a defender has avoided an attack; and...
- **Damage,** when you determine how badly the combatants get hurt.

Combat turns typically last about three seconds in game-world time. For the Awakened, however, time is a toy in the hands of brawling gods.

Initiative

As hostilities begin, each player involved makes an initiative roll, as detailed under ***Initiative and Movement*** at the beginning of this chapter. The highest initiatives go first, with the lower ones following behind them.

Phase One: Attack

When guns fire and spells fly, the dice pool you employ depends upon what your character is doing that turn:

- For attacks using projectile guns, roll Dexterity + Firearms; for hypertech force guns, Dexterity + Energy Weapons.

- For attacks with thrown weapons, use Dexterity + Athletics.
- For attacks using hand-held weapons, employ Dexterity + Melee.
- For most hand-to-hand attacks that use fists, claws, body weight, and so forth, roll Dexterity + Brawl. (A handful of attacks employ Dexterity + Athletics, Martial Arts, Do, and so forth instead, but we'll get into that later.)
- For attacks based in magick, roll your Arete/Enlightenment Trait. If those attacks involve a strike or weapon that needs to hit the target (like a punch, plasma cannon, and so forth), roll Dexterity + either Brawl, Firearms, or Energy Weapons, depending on the attack.

For the specific difficulties and results involved, see the various combat maneuvers described below. Weapons, combat circumstances, hazards, and fighting maneuvers are summarized on the ***Combat System Charts***, starting on (p. 445).

Phase Two: Defense

A character who doesn't want to get hit with an attack has several options, all detailed below. These *defensive maneuvers* use the successes you roll to take away from the successes rolled by your opponent. (See ***Resisted Actions*** in **Chapter Eight**.)

Now, no self-respecting person wants to get hit. That's why you roll attack rolls to strike other characters. A defensive maneuver, however, represents a character who's making an extra effort to avoid injury. You can declare a defensive maneuver at any point in your turn, so long as your character has an action left to perform that turn. If you had already declared a different action for that turn, the Storyteller may have you make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6), or else spend a Willpower point in order to change your character's mind in the blur of combat.

You can perform a *dodge*, *block*, or *parry* as part of an attack – parrying a sword and then sliding your blade up your opponent's own, for example, or dodging around a corner and then taking a shot at your enemies from behind cover. In each case, you need to divide your dice pool, as mentioned in **Chapter Eight**. A *desperate defense*, on the other hand, reflects all-out escape. A character can't do anything else that turn.

Dodging

To have your character bob and weave herself out of harm's way, make a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll. The difficulty depends upon the nature of the attack and the distance that the dodging character wants to cover during that dodge. Dodging a hand-to-hand strike is easy (difficulty 5), but dodging firearms at close range is far more challenging (difficulty 9 or 10).

Each success on this roll subtracts one success from the attacker's roll; thus, the dodging character needs to roll at least as many successes to avoid that blow as the attacker rolled to inflict it in the first place. Dodging requires a certain amount of room to move. If you're in a tight doorway, it's pretty hard to dodge.

If your character has both the Acrobatics Trait and enough room to use such moves, you could use Acrobatics instead of Athletics for a dodge attempt.

Many mystic attacks (fireballs, mind-crushes, etc.) can be dodged if the target sees them coming. For details, see ***Dodging and Resistance*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 544-545).

Blocking

To use a body part to deflect a blow, roll Dexterity + Brawl. The difficulty depends upon the attack but often ranges between 6 (for a fist) and 8 (a table). Like dodging, each success scored by the defender removes one success from the attacker's attempt.

Normally, only hand-to-hand attacks can be blocked. A martial artist might try to block incoming spears, other thrown objects, or arrows with a Dexterity + Martial Arts roll (difficulty 8), but most folks are pretty much screwed in that department. Normal humans (like mages) cannot block lethal or aggravated damage attacks like swords, claws, and so on unless the character in question is wearing armor, using Life magick to harden his skin, or employing either Martial Arts or Do to reflect specialized combat training. Even then, certain attacks – like chainsaws – can't really be blocked without losing an arm in the process. For the results of trying to block a lethal damage weapon, see ***Rebound Attacks***, below.

Parrying and Rebound Attacks

When using a weapon to block an incoming attack, roll Dexterity + Melee. In other regards, a parry works like a block.

Rebound Attack: If the attacker uses a brawl attack that gets blocked by a parry (like, say, a punch blocked by a knife), then the attacker probably hurts herself. To reflect that predicament, have the defender roll a *rebound attack* if the successes he rolled to block the attack outnumber the successes his opponent rolled while attacking him.

A rebound attack uses a typical Dexterity + Melee roll. The character who was blocking gets to use his full dice pool, though, as he wasn't actually attacking his opponent. If successful, this rebound attack scores the usual amount of damage... and then adds one more success for each success that outnumbered the attacker's roll. (A parry that scores two successes more than necessary, for example, would add two more successes to that rebound attack.) The moral of this story: *don't try to kick someone who's got a chainsaw in his hands.*

Desperate Defense

If all you want is to get the hell outta Dodge, you can have your character perform a desperate defense. In this case, he's putting everything he's got into getting away from harm – as noted earlier, he can't do anything else that turn.

For a *desperate defense*, roll your character's Dexterity + Athletics; again, if he's got Acrobatics and enough room to employ them, you can use that Trait instead. Your character gets to use his full dice pool against the first attack, but he must subtract one die from each subsequent attack that turn because it's harder to escape several attacks than it is to duck a single assault.

Optional Rule: Cinematic Damage

Mages can be unusually badass, especially if they're martial artists, mercenaries, cops, Templars, Black Suits, and so on. And in the movies, badass people manage to shrug off gunshot wounds, burns, and other things that would, in real life, send them to the hospital or morgue. Therefore, the *Cinematic Damage* option makes an allowance for such people.

Under this *optional rule*, human characters may soak lethal damage with a soak roll at difficulty 8. This doesn't mean that bullets bounce off the character's chest but that the damage comes across as the proverbial flesh wound, rather than as gaping cuts and shattered bones.

Depending on the tone of your chronicle, the Storyteller may restrict this ability to characters with a Stamina Trait of 3 or higher; that way, you don't have grandmas soaking shotgun blasts, but tough sorcerers can stand up to a dude with a switchblade. Even so, what's good for the mage is good for the mortal. If your group chooses to employ the Cinematic Damage option, then *all* suitable human characters should get it – not just player characters. **(For an additional option, see the *Too Tough to Die Merit* in Appendix II, p. 644.)**

Regardless of Stamina, this option does not allow mages to soak aggravated damage. Unless vulgar magick or certain types of armor are involved, *mages cannot soak agg damage*, period. That's why it's called *aggravated* – because it's as scarily fatal as an angry werewolf's claws.

Countermagick

Essentially a mystic dodge, *countermagick* uses Arete to undo a rival mage's attacks. For more details, see ***Countermagick*** in **Chapter Ten** (p. 545-546).

Phase Three: Damage

If and when an attack hits the target, it's time to figure out how badly that target gets hurt. The attacking player rolls her dice pool against difficulty 6, and each success inflicts one health level's worth of damage.

Especially successful attacks inflict more damage. For each success *above the first one* that the player scores on her attack roll, she adds one more die to the damage dice pool. (Three successes on the attack roll would add two more dice to the damage roll, and so on.)

Remember, though, that *dodges and blocks subtract successes*; a character who rolls five successes on an attack roll but has three taken away by a dodge inflicts the damage from only two successes (one extra die), not from five, even though she still hits her opponent.

Types of Damage

As noted earlier under ***Health and Injury***, attacks inflict one of three types of damage:

- **Bashing** damage comes from blunt force trauma: fists, clubs, table legs, etc. A person can *soak* bashing damage (see below) with his Stamina Trait. On a character sheet, bashing damage gets marked with a single slash (/) rather than an X.
- **Lethal** damage reflects deadly trauma. Unless they're wearing armor, people – mages included – *cannot* soak lethal damage... which is what makes it lethal. Indicate this form of damage on your character sheet with an X.
- **Aggravated** damage represents the most awful ways to die. Mages cannot soak it without magick or certain types of armor. Indicate aggravated damage with an asterisk (*) on your character sheet.

Again, for details about these three types of damage, and the process of recovering from their effects, see the ***Health and Injury*** section (pp. 406-409).

Adding Damage Up

Pain adds up. A character who takes severe damage on top of minor injuries winds up getting depleted quickly unless he manages to recover. So when you're noting damage down on your character's Health chart, the most dangerous types of damage go on top of that chart.

When recording bashing damage, put a slash at the top of the Health chart; if you take lethal damage, then turn that / into an X by writing another line through it. If you take aggravated damage after that, then put another line through the X, turning it into an asterisk.

According to the rules presented in other World of Darkness books, those marks are cumulative; if you add that X or asterisk to the top of your Health chart, then you'd add another / to the empty square underneath the marked ones. Unlike vampires and werewolves, however, mages don't usually regenerate their injuries, and so two or three blows can take a mage out of action unless he's incredibly fortunate. Therefore, consider it a Storyteller's judgment call. Your troupe may elect to simply keep the marks as they are – turning slashes into Xs or asterisks if need be but not also adding new slashes to the empty boxes on the track. Considering the wound penalties associated with injuries (again, see ***Health and Injury***), that's a reasonable option for mages in combat.

Soaking Damage

Life's tough, but living things can be pretty tough too. In game terms, characters who take damage can try to soak it before subtracting health levels from those injuries.

To soak damage, roll your character's Stamina against a difficulty determined by the damage:

- Bashing damage can be soaked by any character at difficulty 6.
- Humans can't normally soak lethal damage, although exceptionally tough ones may try. (See the ***Cinematic Damage*** option in the sidebar nearby.)
- Aggravated damage is too severe for humans (or most other creatures) to soak at all. Standing up to such attacks requires paranormal protection or heavy-duty armor.

Each success on a soak roll reduces the damage by one health level. If the soak roll eliminates all of the successes scored against a character, then that character takes the hit without getting hurt at all.

Examples: *Spider Chase gets in an argument with her soon-to-be ex-boy-toy. Striving to appear manly, he slaps her for two health levels' worth of bashing damage. Spider's player rolls three dice, based on Spider's Stamina 3; she gets two successes, and Spider glares at the boy-toy as his blow has no effect. Grabbing up a big spiked boot, she proceeds to whale on said boy-toy. She, too, inflicts bashing damage, but he's not nearly as lucky with his soak rolls...*

Later, in a far more serious brawl, Spider gets cut by a tough guy with a knife. Normally, she won't be able to soak that wound – coming from a knife blade, it's lethal. The Storyteller, though, decides that Spider's Stamina 3 makes her tough enough to use the Cinematic Damage option. The knife inflicts five health levels in damage – three from the attack, plus two more for the assailant's successes. Spider rolls three successes on her soak attempt, eliminating three of those five successes. Good thing for her, bad thing for the tough guy!

Spider enjoys spinning fire; being SET ON fire, though, is a bit much. Facing off against some weirdo with a flaming sword, she ducks the blow but winds up falling into burning wreckage. The fire burns her for two health levels of aggravated damage. No soak roll for Spider this time. She takes both health levels as the fire shows that even fire-dancers have their limits.

Magick and Violence

Beyond the usual fisticuffs and fireworks, a mage can use her Arts to enhance her combat abilities. The obvious "toss a fireball and burn them up" avenue gets explored in the following chapter. On a more subtle level, though, the Awakened can plant coincidences that intensify the effects of a kick or gunshot; drop walls on top of their enemies; whip up storms of dust that cover an escape or blind an enemy; empty an attacker's ammunition clip ("*Gee, I guess you hadn't counted your shots, dude...*"); or employ any other option a mage could imagine and perform.

Beyond such tricks, there's the simple fact that plenty of mages focus their Arts through weapons, gadgets, and martial techniques. A Bata'a mage could use capoeira as her instrument for Forces, Life, or Time attacks. Iteration X is notorious for channeling devastating Forces Sphere Effects through their hypertech. An Akashic Brother can put Entropy (spotting weak points), Forces (kinetic impact), Life (body knowledge), and other Spheres to work behind a single punch or kick. Combat and violence are intrinsic parts of many mystic practices – which explains everything from howling Norse berserkers to the implacable aura held by agents of authority.

The ***Magickal Fighting Tactics*** section on p.417, features several possibilities for the Awakened warrior. In more general game terms, magick and violence can fit together in three different yet related ways:

Violence as a Focus

Weapons, force, or martial arts can provide a focus for mystic or technological Arts, as shown in the ***Focus and the Arts*** section of **Chapter Ten**. In this case, the weapon or activity provides the "gun and trigger" of the spell. The mage fires a gun, throws a punch, makes a dodge, or takes whatever action is necessary to employ the focus.

To reflect this activity, the player makes two rolls: an Arete (or Enlightenment) roll to see if the magick succeeds, and an appropriate Attribute + Ability roll to see if the attack hits its target. *If the magick is the attack and the attack provides the magick*, then in game terms, this is a single action – the mage is firing a gun *as the act* that casts the Effect, and although there are two rolls, it counts as only one action. For many willworkers, especially Technocrats, that tool or action allows the character to do what she does. A Man in Black cannot snap his fingers and fire bullets – he needs his gun to focus that attack. No weapon, no Effect.

- If the Arete roll fails, then there's no magickal Effect; a punch might land, but a gun will not fire.
- If the Arete roll botches, then the attack goes wrong, and Paradox results. (See **Chapter Ten**.)
- If the Arete roll succeeds, then the magick works as planned.

Assuming the attack is successful, the Effect goes off within the same turn. Unlike in previous editions of **Mage**, there is no delay between turns *if* the Effect is focused through the attack in question.

In most cases, however, that attack still needs to *hit* its target – the punch must land, the gunshot must nail the opponent, etc. Thus, the Attribute + Ability roll determines whether or not the attack hits its intended destination. If not, then the shot goes wild, the punch misses, and so on. The *magick* has worked, but the *attack* has not. Cyborg X344 fires his plasma disruptor cannon, but the witch in his sights ducks aside.

Dodged magickal Effects can still demolish the *environment*, however. That's why fights between mages tend to cause lots of collateral damage. For details about such damage, see ***Bustin' Stuff*** (pp. 439-441) and the ***Environmental Hazards*** section.

If a weapon is being used as a focus instrument, then the damage from that magickal Effect reflects the damage of that weapon. For attacks in which the magick enhances the damage of an attack – say, by making the sword burst into flames – see ***Magick Enhances Violence***, below.

Optional Rule: General Action Rolls

For times when an important character faces off against a mass of uninspiring mooks, the *general action roll* option allows you to blow through a series of actions that would otherwise take many turns of die rolling and chart checking to complete. Under this *optional rule*, one or two die rolls summarize the action and let the plot move forward quickly.

In a general action roll situation, the Storyteller decides upon an appropriate dice pool – typically Dexterity + a combat or physical action Ability – and then determines a base difficulty (see the chart below). The player makes a single resisted roll. The Storyteller picks up a handful of dice to reflect the abilities of the opposing forces, the player and his Storyteller roll off, and the winner takes it all.

Difficulty	Task
7	Easy (bashing through some mooks)
8	Challenging (firefight in close quarters)
9	Hard (fighting in a snowstorm)
10	Damn Near Impossible (battling shadow imps in the dark)

If the player loses a general action roll contest, then assume that he's knocked down and out in a non-fatal way. He'll probably wind up chained to a death trap or something equally genre-appropriate, but though he may suffer a few levels of bashing damage (or a level or two of lethal damage), he won't get killed by a bad die roll.

Example: *Bruce Foster, Syndicate enforcer, is amused to find himself being mugged. Four kids in gang colors close in on the sharp-dressed man, thinking they've found easy prey. They're wrong, of course, and as Bruce's player Bill picks up seven dice (Dexterity 3 + Brawl 4) they're about to find out just HOW wrong they are.*

Because it's four to one in a dark alley, Bill's Storyteller sets the difficulty at 8. Figuring that the muggers are unskilled kids, she picks out four dice (Dexterity 2 + Brawl 2) to represent the muggers for the resisted roll.

Bill rolls three successes; the Storyteller rolls one. In the game world, Bruce beats the living crap out of the four punks, straightens his tie, wipes the blood off his knuckles with one kid's Metallica T-shirt, and goes along his way after picking the would-be muggers' pockets to compensate for the inconvenience.

If Bill had rolled fewer successes than the Storyteller, then Bruce would have woken up in the alley, his good suit torn, his wallet gone, and his nose bloodied by a minor but failed altercation with a handful of punks.

Mook-a-Palooza

As an alternate to the general action roll, the *mook option* reduces any characters without actual names or identities – that is, cultists, gang members, zombies, etc. – to four health levels: Healthy, Hurt -1, Wounded -2, and Crippled -5. This way, the players can make grinder fodder of the mooks in question without betting the entire situation on the results of one or two die rolls.

If an opponent successfully applies countermagick against an attack, then the magickal element of that attack lessens or disappears. Even so, the *non-magickal* element (the fist, the bullet, etc.) can still cause harm. For details, see ***Countermagick*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 545-546).

Violence Enhances Magick

In this case, the mage commits an act of violence that assists an act of magick: the Infernalist stabs the sacrifice, the mad scientist activates the Doomsday Device, the shapechanger slashes the throat of a wolf and bathes herself in its blood in order to transform into a wolf herself. The act still provides a focus, but the magick *follows* the act.

In game terms, the player rolls her attack normally. Each success on that roll lowers the difficulty of the subsequent Arete roll by -1, up to a maximum modifier of -3.

Unless the magick and the act involve a single activity (as in firing a gun or throwing a punch) an attack used to focus and enhance magick needs to be performed before that spell is cast. If the player wants to use both the attack and the magick in the same turn – say, an Infernalist who wants to open a gate at the moment of sacrifice – then she needs to either divide up her dice pool between them (as detailed under ***Multiple Actions*** in Chapter Eight, p. 388), or else use Time 3 to get extra actions within the same turn.

Magick Enhances Violence

By throwing a little extra power (or a *LOT* of extra power) behind a normal gunshot, punch or dodge, the character can enhance its effectiveness. In this case, the player declares what she's doing; takes an action to cast the Effect; notes the number of successes; and then reduces the difficulty of the attack itself by -1 for each success, up to a maximum modifier of -3 difficulty.

So long as the enhancement looks like something you could do without magick, this sort of thing is almost always coincidental. If it looks impossible, then it's vulgar. A gunshot that ignites the car's gas tank? Sure. A sword that bursts into flame? No.

In all three cases, the activity can provide the focus for the Effect. The option you choose depends on what your mage is doing and what you hope to accomplish by doing it. For more details, see ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects*** in the following chapter **(pp. 532-535)**, plus ***Focus and the Arts*** and the various capabilities of Sphere-based magick.

Fast-Casting in a Fight

In many cases, a mage in the heat of combat is *fast-casting* – that is, making stuff up in the heat of that moment. Rules-wise, a fast-casting character adds +1 to her usual difficulty, including the difficulty of any Effect cast in a single turn during a fight. Rituals that involve preparation before a fight, however, do not suffer this fast-casting penalty. **(See the *Magickal Difficulty Modifiers* chart, Chapter Ten, p. 503.)**

This rule *does not apply to mages who use the martial arts practice* (including Do) *or employ weapons as an instrument of focus*. Such mages are assumed to have both training and experience with integrating magick, combat, and the reflexes involved in both.

Examples of Magickal Violence

Secret Agent John Courage goes up against a vampire. His player, Brian, has several options:

- **Violence as a Focus:** Employing the ***Stone-Shattering Fist Strike*** (a Life 3/ Matter 3/ Entropy 1 Effect that uses Entropy to spot weak spots), John Courage puts his Black Suit training to good use. Brian declares that he's using the martial arts practice as a focus, rolls his Enlightenment Trait, and scores four successes. Then he rolls his Dexterity + Martial Arts dice pool to reflect the punch itself. He scores two successes, so John Courage hits the vampire. The damage comes from the Effect – in this case, eight health levels of damage, made aggravated by the Life Sphere. Soak *THAT*, Count Chocula!

- **Violence Enhances Magick:** Realizing that his greatest weapon is fear, and that vampires fear fire, John Courage coolly eyes the vampire, removes a vial of fluid from his coat pocket, douses his gloves with it, takes out a lighter, flicks it to life, and then sets his gloves on fire. His hands burning, he glares at the vampire – flames glinting off his mirrorshades – and invokes the dreaded Black Suit Aura of Authority.

  One successful Manipulation + Intimidation roll later, Brian has three successes to add to his coincidental Mind 2 Effect of "Surrender or die." The casting roll difficulty, normally 5, drops to 3 (casting rolls cannot drop below difficulty 3), Brian scores six successes, and the weak-willed vampire collapses into a quivering heap. Secret Agent John Courage has neither said a word nor struck a blow, but victory is his.

- **Magick Enhancing Violence:** Looking for a weakness in the vampire's defense, Brian casts a coincidental Entropy 1 Effect through the Stability Integrity Matrix scanner built into John Courage's mirrorshades. It's a coincidental Effect, so Brian rolls John Courage's Enlightenment, gets three successes, and lowers the difficulty of John Courage's next blow by -3. Taking no chances, he employs a Death Strike maneuver. Courage's Dexterity + Martial Arts roll scores six successes, thanks to the lowered difficulty, meaning Strength +2 in lethal damage, plus five more dice from those extra successes. Weakness found, analyzed, and utilized.

Combat Tactics and Circumstances

Most fighters must get by without magick. Even then, though, various tactics and circumstances can change elements of combat – wearing armor, being knocked over, fighting blind, and so forth. For the magickal systems involved, see **Chapter Ten**; and for general applications of magick in combat, see ***Magick and Violence***, above.

In game terms, most circumstances can be handled by either by raising or lowering either difficulties or dice pools. (You'll rarely do both at the same time.) Some of the more common combat-oriented circumstances include:

Aborting an Action

As mentioned above under ***Phase Two: Defense***, you can have your character abort his planned action in favor of a defensive maneuver, so long as he has an action with which to act. Such abrupt changes of plan technically require either a temporary Willpower point or a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. (Your Storyteller has the final say about that requirement.) Ducking out of your original plans is considered a reflexive action, as described in **Chapter Eight**, and isn't counted as an action in and of itself.

Ambush

Attacking from surprise, an assailant can get the upper hand on her opponent. In game terms, the attacker rolls Dexterity + Stealth (+ the Arcane Background, if she has it) in a resisted roll against her target's Perception + Alertness.

If the attacker wins, then she gets one attack roll against her opponent before any initiative rolls are made; if she's got successes left over after canceling his successes out, then she can add one die to her attack dice pool for each success. Let's say that Lee Ann surprises a rogue Acharne Cultist; if her player rolls four successes to the Cultist's two, then she adds two more dice to her attack pool.

On a tie, the attacker goes first but the defender can take a defensive maneuver. And if the defender wins, then he spots the ambush before the trap springs, and both parties roll their normal initiative.

Certain situations and characters make ambush impossible. Sneaking up on someone when you're wearing power armor isn't feasible, and some people (especially Time Masters) seem impossible to surprise. Ultimately, the Storyteller gets the final call regarding the potential of an ambush... which doesn't mean, of course, that the attacker knows in advance that her assault will fail.

Armor and Shields

Thick coats, flack suits, cybernetic armor, and other methods of protection absorb the damage of an attack. In game terms, armor adds dice to a character's soak roll and allows a human being to soak lethal damage as well as certain types of aggravated damage – a vampire's fangs, most likely, but not fire, or Life Sphere magick.

Light armor is easy enough to move around in, and Matter-based Effects can turn business suits or lingerie into cloth-weight armor too. Most forms of normal-tech armor, though, get cumbersome. Certain types of armor inflict a penalty upon the wearer's Dexterity-based dice pool and demand time to put on or take off. Slipping on a biker jacket takes a single easy action, but a cop donning riot gear needs several minutes to suit up properly.

Shields: Shields, meanwhile, act as protective gear that can be brought to bear when facing an enemy. An opponent who's facing your shield in hand-to-hand combat adds +1 or +2 to his difficulty to hit you, depending on the size of the shield in question. If it's being used to ward off projectile weapons (bottles, rocks, bullets, etc.), then a shield also acts as armor, reducing a blow by one success for every level in the shield's Rating.

That said, a shield occupies one hand, restricting the user's movements and potential activities. Blocking a specific incoming attack (say a volley of bullets or a swung fire axe) may demand a Dexterity + Melee roll and a dedicated shield blocking action. Shields are heavy, too, and they suggest that you're looking for trouble. Outside of riot-trained police (who often use them in formation) and medieval reenactment enthusiasts, you won't find many people in the 21st century using shields.

For various types of protective gear, see the ***Armor and Shields chart***, under ***Combat System Charts*** (p. 447).

Blinded, Knocked Down, Immobilized, or Stunned

Normal combat rules assume that everyone's able to move more or less freely. Certain handicaps, however, change those rules:

- **Blinding:** A character who's been blinded by injury or darkness cannot dodge, parry, or block incoming attacks. He also adds +2 to the difficulty of all visually dependent actions until he's able to see again.

- **Knockdown:** Someone who's been knocked off his feet must take one action to scramble back up. If he can't do so, consider him temporarily immobilized until he regains his feet.

- **Immobilization:** When a character gets held down, paralyzed, or otherwise rendered unable to move, any other character who attacks him reduces her difficulty by -2 if the target can still move around a bit, and the attacker may hit him automatically if he cannot move at all.

- **Stunning:** If – after the soak roll – a character suffers health-level damage that equals or exceeds her Stamina rating, she's stunned until the end of the following turn. The stunned character can't do anything except perhaps stumble around in a daze. Attack rolls against her during that time reduce their difficulty by -2.

Magickal Fighting Tactics

Given the power they command, why should mages stake their survival on mere human weapons and tactics? Everything, from lightning bolts and disintegration beams to one-inch punches that shatter a person's ribcage, is possible for fighters who have the Spheres to use such tactics and the Will to employ them with deadly effect.

- **Focused Magick:** If that attack uses a normal attack – like a punch or death-ray cannon – as a focus, the attacker needs to make a successful Dexterity + appropriate combat Ability roll. An Arete roll decides the success or failure of the magick, and the attack roll determines whether or not it hit the target. Such attacks, as mentioned earlier, can be dodged.

- **Openly Magickal:** If the attack is itself magickal – like a lightning bolt, incendiary gesture, transformation blast, or flesh-shredding curse of pure hate – then the assailant rolls her Arete as an attack roll instead. Such attacks are almost always vulgar and can be as dangerous to their originators as to their victims.

- **Indirect Assault:** If the attack is indirect – an earthquake, poison, an Entropy-weakened scaffolding, and so on – then the attacker rolls her Arete as above, but the attack is often coincidental rather than vulgar. This might be the most common tactic in the Awakened arsenal, especially since it's rarely obvious enough to note until later.

- **Tactical Adjustments:** All manner of tricks become possible when you've got a little bit of magick. First-Rank sensory Effects can be especially effective in a combat zone, especially when you're using the Arts to scope out weak spots, see across distances, or analyze opponents and substances. With clever perceptions and a nudge here and there, you can employ many subtle yet effective tactics.

- **Summoned Creatures:** Certain mages also summon other entities to fight for them. That tactic typically requires Spirit Sphere magick plus an Arete roll, and it's vulgar in most places. Still, for powerful shamans and witches, it can be pretty damned effective – see ***Spirit Combatants***, below.

For more details, see ***Magick and Violence***, above.

Multiple Opponents

A character who's fighting several opponents at close range suffers a penalty of +1 difficulty *per attacker* to both her attack and defense rolls, up to a maximum penalty of +4. Fighting two opponents, for instance, would add +2 to those difficulties, and fighting five opponents would add +4 difficulty.

A mage who has Correspondence 1, Mind 1, or Time 2 *and has an active sensory Effect in one of those Spheres going at the time of combat* can ignore this penalty. Essentially, such Effects give him an enhanced view of who's doing what to whom.

Rough Weather or Terrain

For some odd reason, folks often wind up fighting on ice, in rainstorms, through the middle of burning factories, and so on. When throwing down in ugly circumstances, the combatants might add between +1 and +3 to the difficulties of their various rolls. The specifics depend on the situation, but the terrain may be more dangerous than the warriors themselves – see the ***Environmental Hazards*** section for details.

Spirit Combatants

Avatar Storm or no Avatar Storm, mages can cross spells and blades with spirit entities. Such beings often lack physical substance unless they materialize, so the process of fighting them can be rather strange... certainly different from the tactics and experiences involved in fighting mortal adversaries.

Story-wise, spirits are ideas and essence embodied in often flexible forms. Depending on the nature of the individual spirit, such a being might appear as an ephemeral tempest, a bizarre monstrosity, a ghostly mist creature, an apparently normal person or animal, a chattering tangle of incarnate geometry, or anything you might imagine. In that form, the entity often attacks with not only its limbs but also its Willpower Trait and various mystic *Charms*: spiritual powers that resemble magic but somehow fit into the way things are even when their effects are clearly impossible by scientific reckoning.

The details regarding spirits and their powers can be found later in this chapter, under ***Umbrood Spirit Entities***. For now, we'll simply mention these following combat-essential rules:

- **Spirits Attack and Soak With Willpower and Damage Opponents With Rage:** Unless it has materialized (see below), a spirit entity uses its Willpower Trait for most tasks and inflicts damage with the seething fury of its essence – in game terms, the *Rage* Trait.

- **Rage-Based Spirit Attacks Inflict Deadly Damage:** Most spiritual attacks come by way of Charms. If and when a spirit gets roused enough to turn its Rage against a target, however, that Rage Trait becomes the entity's dice pool, and the damage is either lethal or aggravated. For details, see the ***Blast*** Charm entry in the ***Umbrood Spirit Entities*** section, (pp. 485-495).

- **Mages Can Soak Spirit Rage Damage:** A character with the Spirit Sphere (or Dimensional Science), at any level, can use countermagick to soak a spirit's Rage-based damage. A mage without the Spirit Sphere can try to soak it with his Avatar Trait, difficulty 8. Most other mortal characters cannot soak spirit Rage.

- **Spirits Are Usually Invisible:** Without at least one dot in the Spirit Sphere, mortals, including mages, cannot see spirits unless a given spirit materializes or uses an ***Appear*** Charm to show itself to human eyes. Animals and humans with the Awareness Talent, however, can use it to perceive a nearby spirit's presence, even if they cannot actually *see* it.

- **Spirits Aren't Material:** Composed of ephemera, such entities are not physical in the way most combatants are physical. Although some can use the ***Materialize*** Charm to take on physical form (and thus become as solid as any other Earthly creature), most of them retain their ephemeral essence, which means...

- **To Fight Spirits, You Need the Prime or Spirit Spheres:** Mages who find themselves dealing with Umbrood entities need the Spirit Sphere (or, in Technocratic terms, Dimensional Science) at Rank 2 or higher in order to affect those entities. Spirit 2 allows a mage to touch an entity, and Spirit 3 acts against it the way Life 3 acts against organic beings. Life and Matter are completely useless against the Umbrood unless they take on a physical form, and other Spheres are essentially useless, too, unless the mage enters the Umbra to battle a spirit on its own ground.

  Physical attacks go right through a spirit unless the spirit has materialized or the weapon has been enchanted with the Prime Sphere or the Spirit/ Dimensional Science Sphere. Given the bizarre consciousness of most spirits, Mind attacks upon Umbral entities tend to affect the mage instead of the spirit. A combination of Spirit 2 and Prime 2 acts like Life magick on an Umbral entity, with one exception...

- **Entropy Does Bad Things to Ghosts:** The Restless Dead are more closely tied to Entropy than to Spirit. Although the Spirit Sphere affects them too, it's the combination of Entropy 3 and Prime 2 that attacks their essence on a metaphysical level and acts like Life Sphere magick on them. Unfortunately, this also literally brings out a ghost's worst qualities. Mages who attack ghosts with Entropy magick find themselves confronting a *spectre* – everything vicious and forbidden about the ghost in question.

Regardless of the state of the Gauntlet and Avatar Storm, mages don't wind up fighting spirits very often unless those mages pass into the Otherworlds themselves. When hostile spirits engage the Awakened folk, however, it's a good idea to remember that such antagonists are not human. They're made of different stuff than we are, and they work by rules that most mortals can't even comprehend.

(For more details, see ***Spirit Combat*** on the ***Order of Battle chart***, ***The Otherworlds***, and the aforementioned ***Spirit Entities*** section, all later on in this chapter.)

Targeting a Location

Aiming an attack at a certain location – the gun hand, eyes, the back of a knee – is more difficult than a simple strike but can have marvelous rewards. In game terms, a character targeting a specific location adds to his normal difficulty but adds to his damage dice as well. A targeted strike may bypass armor, knock an object out of the opponent's hand, or have other effects based on the attack and location involved.

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage Modifier
Medium (arm, briefcase)	+1	die
Small (head, hand, gun)	+2	dice
Precise (eye, heart, kneecap)	+3	dice

Ranged Attacks

Like most people, mages prefer to keep a distance between their enemies and their own fragile shells. So, when Technocratic shock troops or joyriding gangbangers make your character's life difficult (or when you *are* the shock troops or gangbangers!), the following systems handle flying lead and other projectiles.

Aiming

Most folks, in a firefight, place more importance on cover than on accuracy. For those characters who take the time and effort to aim correctly, though, the results are more effective.

In game terms, an aiming character must remain more or less still... perhaps striding forward with Terminator menace but otherwise motionless. For each turn spent aiming, add one die to your appropriate attack dice pool, up to a maximum of your character's Perception rating.

A scope adds two dice to that attack roll as well; this bonus, however, applies only to a single shot. Each new shot must be aimed again using the scope in order to get the full bonus and effect. **(Certain scopes reduce attack roll difficulty too – see *Special Gun Sights*, p. 454.)**

In order to aim properly, a character must have at least one dot in either Firearms (to aim guns) or Archery (in order to use bows).

Automatic Gunfire and Strafing

Storms of gunfire mark many battles between the Awakened folk. And thanks to the Technocratic nightmare called automatic weapons, a character can empty her entire ammunition clip in a single wild burst.

Firing a gun at full-auto speed adds 10 dice to the attack roll, but it also raises the difficulty of the shot by +2, courtesy of the gun's recoil. In order to empty a clip, your character needs at least a half-clip of ammo to begin with; once those shots are fired, the clip is useless.

Full-Auto Strafing: When strafing an area, the attacker hoses down that area with bullets. Game-wise, this tactic works

the same way as full-auto fire, except that the successes are distributed evenly between each target involved. If the number of successes rolled winds up smaller than the number of targets, then the Storyteller decides who's been hit and who's been missed by that spray of bullets.

Bows

Long before guns became man's weapon of choice, long-range fighters employed the muscular precision of bows. These days, such weapons seem cumbersome and odd. Still, in the hands of a skilled archer, bows have several advantages over firearms. They're quiet, accurate, and powerful – you can shoot a stake through a vampire's heart at 100 paces if you're a would-be Katniss Everdeen.

These weapons, though, demand more expertise than guns. To use a bow correctly, a character needs the secondary Skill ***Archery***. The player rolls Dexterity + Archery in order to shoot that weapon. Different bows have different difficulty ratings, as listed on the ***Ranged Weapons chart***. A character without the appropriate Ability can *try* to use a bow, but he suffers a +2 difficulty penalty.

Sadly, bows are more breakable than guns. So are bowstrings. If the would-be archer botches a roll, the bowstring snaps and must be replaced before the weapon can be used again. (Wits + Crafts or Archery, at +1 difficulty – assuming you have an extra bowstring... if not, thou art fuck'ed.) Bows also take longer to send off their projectiles than guns do. In game terms, an amateur archer must nock and draw the arrow (an automatic action) before he can loose it. A character with three dots or more in Archery, however, can nock, draw, and loose as a single action. A crossbow, meanwhile, takes two turns to ready and shoot. Skill doesn't matter here, though, because the mechanisms involved move only so fast. A Time 3 Effect, of course, can speed the whole process up by giving extra actions to the character – see the ***Time Sphere*** entry in **Chapter Ten,** (pp. 522-523).

We weren't kidding about that staking a vampire from a distance trick. *Saying* it, however, is easier than *doing* it. To accomplish that feat, the archer needs to score at least five successes and must also inflict at least three health levels (after soaking) in order to pierce the monster's chest and bring his undead dominion to a splintery halt.

Cover and Movement

Magick or no magick, gunfights are no place for carelessness. Folks who can't shrug off bullets or energy blasts use cover as often as possible. Such protection often comes into play during car chases, drive-bys, firefights, and other attacks on people who aren't crazy enough to stand up and get shot at. The problem, of course, is that you can't shoot what you can't see. In order to aim and fire, you've got to expose a bit of yourself to your enemy's gunshots as well.

Cover adds to the difficulty of hitting a target; the more cover a character has, the harder it is to hit her. Conversely, it's also harder to shoot from certain positions or to fire accurately while you're moving as well. In either case, the shooting character suffers a penalty to her shots, even as she gets the benefits of cover.

Cover	Difficulty to Hit Target	Shooter's Difficulty
Lying Flat	+1	0
Moving	+1	+1
Behind Wall	+2	+1
Only Head Exposed	+3	+2

With or without cover, a character can move up to one half of his maximum running distance and still act without taking a penalty or dividing up his dice pool. (See ***Movement*** at the beginning of this chapter.) Ducking behind walls and dodging behind cars are time-honored tactics for the modern gunfighter, and a person who wants to avoid a one-way trip to the Shadowlands will use cover and movement to her best advantage.

Range

Every weapon on the ***Ranged Weapons*** chart has a certain listed ***Range*** as part of its entry. That Trait shows the weapon's medium effective range; within this distance, the difficulty is considered to be 6. A given weapon can be fired up to twice that listed Range at difficulty 8 (possibly higher at the Storyteller's call). Within two yards or less, however, the characters are within point-blank range and the difficulty drops to 4.

Reloading

Guns run out of ammo... sometimes, when dealing with mages, more unexpectedly than usual. Smart gunfighters carry extra ammunition for such occasions. Assuming that your character has a spare clip handy, an automatic weapon can be reloaded during combat by taking a single action to do so. That gun can still be fired within the same turn – the player simply loses two dice from his usual attack dice pool.

Revolvers are another matter. Because they don't use clips, such guns usually have to be loaded bullet by bullet unless you've got a speed-loader already primed with bullets. A character with a speed-loader can slap a new clip into her gun, as above. If she doesn't have a speed-loader ready, she needs to take a full turn to reload that pistol manually. No other actions are possible that turn, though a Time 3 Effect can slow a temporal pool around the mage, during which time she can load her gun normally and then shoot.

A character with a Firearms rating of 1 or better can reload without making a roll under normal circumstances, though certain complications (badly hurt, reloading in a moving car, and so on) might demand a Dexterity + Firearms roll. Reloading a spent clip or speed-loader with fresh bullets, however, requires a Dexterity + Firearms roll (difficulty 6) and an entire turn.

Three-Round Burst

Many automatic weapons can fire off three-round bursts. As with the full-auto fire circumstance above, these bursts add extra dice to your attack roll – three extra dice for a three-round burst – at the cost of a higher difficulty (in this case, +1 to the normal difficulty). The listed damage is based upon a single bullet

Optional Rule: Weapon Length

When you bring a knife to a katana fight, you're at a distinct disadvantage. To reflect the inherent dangers of battling an opponent with a longer weapon, this *optional rule* subtracts one die from the attack dice pool of the character who's got the shorter weapon. This option applies only to hand-to-hand situations. If you find yourself facing off against a HIT Mark with nothing but your athame at hand, it's time to be *anywhere* but there.

from the gun in question. Obviously, this tactic expends three bullets each time a burst is fired. Check the ***Ranged Weapons chart*** to see which weapons can fire three-round bursts.

Thrown Weapons

When a gun's too much and a fist doesn't reach far enough, a hurled beer mug or knife can be remarkably effective... especially when enhanced with a bit of magick.

Throwing objects is easy enough; actually *hitting* someone with one requires a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll. That roll's difficulty is typically 6, though close targets might be difficulty 5 instead. Distant targets, or clumsy objects being thrown (tables, street signs, weapons that haven't been designed to be thrown), may raise that difficulty by +1 or +2.

If the attacker knows the Sphere of Forces, he could add a push of Forces 2 to a thrown weapon, adding velocity and momentum to the hurled object. Each success scored with this coincidental trick lowers the difficulty of the attack by -1, to a maximum reduction of -3. This, in turn, makes it more likely that the attack will score additional damage – see ***Phase Three: Damage*** and ***Magick Enhancing Violence***, above.

Difficulties, damage, and other details associated with different weapons can be found on the ***Ranged Weapons chart***, under ***Thrown Weapons***. The range of a hurled weapon usually depends upon the strength of the thrower and both the bulk and aerodynamic qualities of the object. The Storyteller should feel free to adjust the difficulties and ranges according to circumstances. Sure, a strong cyborg can throw a car... but really, how *far* can he throw it, especially when the Masses are watching him?

Two Weapons

If you wanna get your John Woo on (and really – who *doesn't?*), the two-fisted gunslinger stunt is an old favorite. Outside the movies, though, it's far more difficult than it looks. A shooter who employs two guns at once needs to divide her Dexterity + Firearms dice pool between both weapons and also add a +1 difficulty penalty to the gun in her off hand. That said, a skillful combatant can lay down some serious damage with a pair of large pistols and the will to use them.

Close Combat

Because mages are normal humans, and because normal humans aren't particularly strong when stacked up against other Night-Folk, mages and their human allies must bring imaginative fighting techniques to the arena. Thankfully (for the mages, at least), humankind has spent millennia refining methods of effective force.

The following systems cover the many techniques an Awakened character might use to take her enemies down. Each section features notes about the necessary elements of each maneuver: damage, roll, and so forth. If a maneuver requires two actions instead of one, the attacker must either divide her dice pool between them or employ a Time 3 Effect in order to finish the job. Either way, the attack takes place within one turn unless specified otherwise.

General Hand-to-hand Maneuvers

Any character with the right physique can perform the following maneuvers. Some moves, however, are limited to certain shapes – you can't claw someone if you don't have claws! For the most part, these attacks inflict bashing damage. Exceptions are noted in each entry.

• **Bite:** Creatures with teeth can bite. Human jaws normally inflict Strength in bashing damage, but a shapechanged mage's teeth can deal out lethal harm instead. Certain Night-Folk inflict aggravated damage with their bites, but a mage – even in a more dangerous form – inflicts lethal damage only. Typically, a bite attack causes Strength +1 damage; an especially large mouth or teeth, however, may add +2 or even +3 to that attack.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 5
Damage: Strength +1/ B or L **Actions:** 1

• **Claw:** Cyborgs, beasts, shapechanged mages, and folks wearing surgically implanted claws can slash their enemies. Again, this inflicts lethal, not aggravated, damage unless the attacker has some sort of special advantage like Primium claws or Quintessence enhancement. (See the entry for the ***Prime Sphere*, Chapter Ten**). Normal claws inflict Strength +1; Wolverine-style claws dish out Strength +2, and *holy-shit-lemmie-outta-here* claws may deal out Strength +3.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Strength +1-3/ L or A **Actions:** 1

• **Disarm:** With a clever strike and twist, the fighter removes her opponent's weapon from his hand. To succeed, the attacker rolls Dexterity + Melee at +1 to her usual difficulty; if her successes exceed her opponent's Strength score, then he drops that weapon. If she doesn't score enough successes to disarm the opponent, she still inflicts her usual damage. If she botches that roll, she loses her own weapon instead.

A brave or skillful attacker can try to disarm an armed opponent with her bare hands. In this case, the roll is Dexterity + Brawl, the difficulty is 8, and she subtracts one die from her usual attack dice pool. A character with at least three dots in the Martial Arts Skill can perform this bare-handed disarm maneuver at difficulty 7 instead; in this case, the roll is Dexterity + Martial Arts, not Brawl.

Roll: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** +1 / 8/ 7
Damage: Special **Actions:** 1

• **Flank or Rear Attacks:** By attacking an opponent's flank, an attacker reduces his difficulty by -1; by attacking from the rear, he reduces it by -2.

Roll: Normal **Difficulty:** -1 / -2
Damage: Normal **Actions:** 1

• **Grapple:** Grabbing hold of her antagonist, the attacker tries to either immobilize him (a hold) or crush him (a clinch). The latter option requires a bit of strength, but Life Sphere magick makes many things possible.

To grapple another character, the attacker needs to make a successful Strength + Brawl, Martial Arts, or Do roll. If she wants to bring the pain with her attack, the player can roll her Strength to inflict damage, beginning on the next turn and continuing until her opponent breaks free. That foe may try to soak that damage as usual. If, instead, the attacker wants to hold her opponent still, he's stuck in her grip until his next action.

To escape a grapple, the opponent has two options: he can break free by successfully beating his attacker in a resisted Strength + Brawl roll, or he can reverse the hold by doing the same thing and then scoring two successes more than his attacker has scored. At the Storyteller's option, an agile character can use Dexterity instead of Strength to escape; if he's got Acrobatics, Martial Arts, or Do, he can use either of those Traits instead of Brawl.

Grappling attacks normally inflict bashing damage. A character who's got barbs, spikes, or claws – and who tears into her victim with them while he's held – inflicts lethal damage instead.

Roll: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Strength or none/B **Actions:** 1

• **Kick:** Lashing out with a leg or two, the character hits an opponent where it hurts. This attack reflects a pretty basic strike; for elaborate martial arts kicks, see below. Kicks normally inflict bashing damage. A cyborg, HIT Mark, or other massive attacker, though, may deal out lethal damage from sheer density.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: Strength +1/B **Actions:** 1

• **Punch:** One fist, one face, one very basic attack. Certain punches – like uppercuts or shots to the kidneys – may deal out extra damage with a higher difficulty rating. (See ***Dirty Fighting*** and ***Martial Arts*** for several examples.) Most punches inflict bashing damage, but punches by metal-handed cyborgs can do lethal harm instead.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Strength/B **Actions:** 1

• **Reading an Opponent:** Mages specialize in out-thinking their opponents. With the Storyteller's permission, a hand-to-hand combatant may try to read an opponent's intentions with a roll of Perception + either Brawling, Do, or Martial Arts. This becomes a resisted roll, pitting the observer's Perception + combat Trait against her opponent's Wits + combat Trait.

If the observer succeeds, she adds one die per success to the dice pool to perform her next action.

Reading an opponent demands one action. The character may attempt to do this only once per combat scene for each dot she has in Wits. (A Wits 3 character, then, could try this trick up to a maximum of three times in a scene.) The Storyteller might choose to limit this trick to characters who have at least two dots in both Wits and the appropriate combat Trait; slow-witted people who don't understand fighting aren't good at this sort of thing. At ranges beyond 20 feet or so, this trick does not work unless the observer has at least one dot in the Correspondence or Mind Spheres and uses a perceptual Effect to read his opponent at a distance.

Roll: Perception + Combat Trait **Difficulty:** 6

Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

• **Sweep:** With a weapon (Melee) or leg (Brawl, Martial Arts, or Do), our fighter knocks his enemy's own legs out from under him. Martial artists and Do-trained fighters with a specialty in Weapon Forms can use their Martial Arts or Do (rather than Melee) to sweep an opponent's legs out from under him while using a weapon... and may get extra successes when the player rolls a 10. If the blow succeeds, the antagonist winds up on the ground that turn and, although the fall won't hurt him, it'll place him at a disadvantage. (See ***Blinding, Knocked Down, Immobilized, or Stunned***, above.)

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl or Melee **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: None/B **Actions:** 1

• **Tackle:** Employing a mix of weight and momentum, the attacker throws herself into her opponent. This sort of thing can hurt both parties, but it's an effective way to stop a fleeing enemy.

A tackle requires at least two yards of distance to achieve effective momentum. Each combatant must make a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6 for the attacker, difficulty 6 + the attacker's successes for the target), or else wind up sprawled on the ground afterward.

A would-be tackler who botches either trips and falls (inflicting one die of damage upon herself for every yard she ran); slams into something else (inflicting that damage *plus* her Strength damage upon herself); or crashes into her target and bounces off (suffering the opponent's Stamina in damage and leaving the target himself unharmed).

For the most part, tackle damage is bashing, not lethal. A person crushed beneath the weight of a flying cyborg, however – or hit by someone who's suddenly amped her mass with Life or her momentum with Forces – is liable to need a hospital, stat; in game terms, this tactic inflicts lethal damage instead. Do we really need to point out that a fragile human mage who flings herself into a cyborg or mass-enhanced body is liable to suffer that kind of damage herself...?

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Strength/B or L **Actions:** 1

Dirty Fighting

Folks raised on the streets have nasty ways of taking a person down. It's sheer survival in such environments. The following collection of brutal blows demands at least three dots in the Brawl Ability, plus a background that includes such dirty tricks (gang membership, violent neighborhood, rape-prevention classes, and so on). Street-honed mages might also use such tactics as tools to focus ugly "coincidences", especially ones using Entropy, Life, Mind, and (when the Sphere increases kinetic momentum) Forces.

Mage Trick: The Thunder Punch

Throwing Enlightened force behind a punch, kick, or other hand-to-hand attack, a fighting mage delivers an unexpectedly powerful blow. Story-wise, the trick looks like a perfectly executed strike. In game terms, the mage employs either Correspondence 1 (to judge the perfect spot to hit), Entropy 1 or 2 (to either find a weak spot or adjust probability to the perfect place and time), Forces 2 (to increase velocity), Life 3 (to boost Strength or to damage the enemy internally), Mind 2 (to send an impulse to surrender), Matter 2 (to break inert materials), Prime 2 (to directly attack the target's Pattern), or Time 2 (to note the perfect opening). As with most other tricks, each success reduces the difficulty of the attack roll by -1 per success, to a maximum adjustment of -3.

In most cases, this "thunder punch" – which can also be performed with hand-to-hand weapons – is coincidental and inflicts bashing damage. A Life 3 or Prime 3 Pattern assault, however, inflicts aggravated damage instead, using the blow to focus an all-out metaphysical attack. Truly powerful blows may slip into vulgar magick if the mage appears to be too weak to have inflicted such a powerful strike... like, say, the proverbial skinny geek smashing every bone in the body of a towering muscle-thug. Oh, yeah – the thunder punch can kill people if you're not careful, so it's best to save this trick for Night-Folk and other such opponents unless your mage wants to face charges for manslaughter or murder.

Another flipside to the blow is obvious: you can hurt yourself while doing it. If the target manages to soak every level of damage inflicted by a thunder punch, then the attacker hurts himself; the damage he would have inflicted on the target gets inflicted on the mage instead (yes, he can try to soak it too). In the case of the Pattern attacks, the mage simply suffers bashing damage, not aggravated harm. If, however, the mage tries to thunder punch a wall, steel armor, solid stone, and so forth, he might take lethal damage instead, possibly shattering his hand or foot... or, if he's using a weapon to strike, breaking his weapon against that unyielding surface.

• **Blinding:** Scratching an enemy's eyes, throwing dirt in his face, spraying him with chemicals or using some similar attack, the brawler tries to render her opponent sightless. If she succeeds, the enemy gets blinded for one turn per success and loses two dice from his dice pools until he recovers.

This attack doesn't normally inflict lasting damage. At the Storyteller's option, however, a truly vicious strike (gouging with Life-grown claws, showering him with acid, etc.) might inflict a health level or two of lethal damage in addition to the blindness. Five successes or more might destroy the eyes completely... and although Life magick can heal such injuries, there's vulgar spellcasting involved unless the healer uses a First Aid pack, cool water, or some other method of coincidentally fixing blindness.

Roll: Dexterity + Subterfuge **Difficulty:** 9
Damage: Special **Actions:** 1

• **Body Slam:** Lifting his opponent up over his head, a strong fighter can use brute strength and momentum to burst various important innards.

This maneuver requires a successful grappling attack. If the enemy can't break free within that turn, the brawler can use his next action to slam his foe into the nearest and most painful surface. The impact typically inflicts bashing damage; if the surface happens to be sharp, spiked, or incredibly hot, however, such injuries might be lethal instead.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl/B or L **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Strength +2 **Actions:** 2

• **Curbstomp:** An ugly way of rearranging someone's face involves propping said face against a curb or other hard surface (sometimes with the mouth open, for extra effect) and then kicking or stomping down on the back of his head. This sort of thing is a great way to score an Attempted Murder rap... or a Murder One charge that's likely to stick!

A curbstomp attack requires a stunned or immobilized target, plus one turn to place his face into position. After that, the brawler stomps and physics does the rest. The attacker rolls his Strength for the attack. This assault inflicts lethal damage and may inflict lasting and horrific injuries (broken teeth, shattered jaw, ruined face, etc.) at the Storyteller's discretion.

Roll: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Strength +2/L **Actions:** 2

• **Haymaker:** Making like a real-life Popeye the Sailor, the brawler winds up, spots an opening, and hurls everything she has into a jaw-cracking punch. If she's successful, this blow typically knocks the opponent back a yard or so unless he makes a Strength roll (difficulty 8) to resist its effects; if he botches that roll, he hits the ground.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: Strength +2/B **Actions:** 1

• **Head Butt:** In a close-clinch situation, the attacker can smash her head into the face or stomach of an opponent. Obviously, this move works only when both antagonists are within head's reach of one another – the attack's main benefit comes from surprise, backed up by a sudden thick skull in the teeth.

Unless the attacker has a horned head, spiked helmet, steel skull, or other lethal implement, the head butt inflicts bashing damage. If the target soaks all of that damage, however, then the attacker is stunned for one turn. Anyone stupid enough to head butt a cyborg or other unyielding opponent suffers the damage she would have inflicted *and* gets stunned for a turn as well. (For rules about being stunned, see ***Blinded, Knocked Down, Immobilized, or Stunned***, above.)

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: Strength +1/B **Actions:** 1

• **Jab Pistol:** Jamming a firearm directly into his opponent's body, the attacker blasts a rather large hole in her. Risky and messy, this move forces the attacker to get as up close and personal as it's possible to get. A successful roll gets inside the opponent's reach. Because the gun's being used hand-to-hand, the maneuver employs Brawl instead of Firearms. Only pistols can be used this way, and the results are... disgusting.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: As per firearm +2 **Actions:** 1

• **Low Blow:** Going for the takedown, a brawler aims a shot at some location – kidneys, septum, genitals, etc. – that's sure to hurt a lot.

If our brawler assailant makes a successful attack roll, her target winds up stunned for one turn for each health level inflicted after the soak roll. He can try to shrug it off with a Stamina roll (difficulty 8), but unless he manages to do so, he's down for the count in agonizing pain. Normally, this trauma involves bashing damage. Low blows struck with claws, teeth, blades, or enhanced crushing force, however, are lethal.

Roll: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: Strength + Stun/B or L **Actions:** 1

• **Pistol Whip:** Adding emphasis to injury, the brawler cracks his opponent across the head or face with a gun or other small, hard, heavy object – a crowbar, brew mug, laptop, etc. This blow inflicts lethal damage and may stun the opponent for one turn if she fails a Stamina roll (difficulty 8)... and for two turns if she botches that roll. In real life, this sort of thing can bust a person's skull; with magick, it can cover for a Life-based Effect that puts the enemy down for the count... maybe to sleep, perhaps forever.

Roll: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: Strength +2/L **Actions:** 1

Martial Arts

People have been beating each other senseless since the dawn of time. These last few decades, though, have witnessed the refinement and popularity of hundreds of martial art disciplines. Skills that had been, until recently, the secret arts of elite warriors have since become sports, pastimes, and self-defense techniques for almost everyone. And though the average person is merely brawling when he opens up the Whup-Ass canister, a skilled martial artist fights far more effectively than that.

Optional Rule: Drunken Style

Aping the effects of intoxication on monkeys and other primates (like people), watchful martial artists recognized the unpredictable nature of a blurry-reflexed fighter. By learning to enter semi-trance drunken mind states, or by training to attack off-beat, these martial artists formulated a style that's incredibly hard to read... and thus, incredibly hard to defend against.

The following *optional rule* allows a practitioner of a drunken style (or, in Akashic circles, the *Broken Rhythm School*) to adopt this unpredictable form. Assuming the lolling drunken stance (see Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master* films), he bobs, weaves, and rolls. In any turn in which he wins initiative, that martial artist adds +2 to the difficulty of any attack he makes, but he also adds +3 to the difficulty of any character who tries to block, dodge, disarm or otherwise counter those attacks. These advantages, however, do not apply in turns during which he loses initiative.

A defender who's using Time Sphere perceptions during the fight can counter this advantage, dodging and defending normally; a Mind reader, however, cannot do so because not even the martial artist himself knows exactly what he's going to do next.

The fighter doesn't have to be drunk when using drunken style martial arts. In order to employ this option, however, the martial artist *must* have at least three dots in either Martial Arts or Do, and must take a specialty in either *Drunken Style* or *Broken Rhythm School*. Normal fighters – drunk or sober –cannot use such techniques effectively.

Lacking the claws and teeth of vampires and other Night-Folk, mages must rely upon weapons and martial arts in a serious fight. And given their disciplined and inquisitive natures, the Awakened often make excellent pupils for the fighting arts... arts that are, on many levels, physical reflections of the mental disciplines involved in magick. Certain mages – especially Black Suits, Thanatoic killers, crafty wizards, and street-savvy witches – even focus their mystic Arts through martial skills, utilizing chi energy and physical conditioning as tools for their arcane practices. Although the Akashic Art of Do is far more refined and potent than typical martial arts – and is therefore detailed below – the Akashayana aren't the only mages who focus magick through a well-aimed punch. **(See the *Martial Arts* practice described in Chapter Ten, pp. 580-581).**

Soft and Hard Techniques

Some practitioners describe "soft" and "hard" approaches to the martial arts: hard styles emphasize direct actions, aggressive stances, thrusting attacks, and sharp defenses, whereas soft styles focus on avoidance, fluid movements, misdirection, and momentum-based techniques that use an attacker's energy against him. One approach strikes; the other flows.

Many practices feature both elements, especially within mixed martial arts that take elements from various practices. Certain practices, however, have distinctly hard components (karate, savate, tiger-style, etc.), and others focus on a soft approach in terms of both philosophy and practice (aikido, wing chun, judo, and so forth). As some of the entries below point out, certain techniques work better with one style than they do with another.

Most disciplines go far beyond combat maneuvers. Additional Abilities like ***Athletics***, ***Acrobatics***, ***Meditation***, and ***Esoterica*** (with specialties like Herbalism, Yoga, Body Control, Chinese or Ayurvedic Medicine, and various philosophies) are part of the essential training for many martial arts. Game-wise, a character should have several dots in such Abilities, reflecting both the physical training and the spiritual and philosophical basis of the art. For suggestions, see the ***Eight Limbs of Expertise*** sidebar in the ***Do*** section below.

The following maneuvers can be used by any character with a few dots in the Martial Arts Skill. For each dot in Martial Arts, you can choose two martial arts maneuvers. Certain advanced maneuvers demand a *Minimum Ability*; only characters with the appropriate dots in the appropriate Abilities may employ this maneuver.

Martial Arts as a Magickal Focus

This section represents the effects of normal martial arts. To employ such arts as a focus, again see the ***Martial Arts*** entry under ***Practice: The Shape of Focus*** in **Chapter Ten** and the ***Magick and Violence*** entry earlier in the combat rules section.

As noted in the **Chapter Six** entry ***Optional Rule: Minimum Abilities*** **(see p. 276)**, a martial artist mage should have at least one dot in Martial Arts (or Do, if she uses Do) for every dot in the highest Sphere she uses through her martial arts techniques. Mage or no mage, a budding karateka should not be able to channel devastating magickal Effects through an art she barely understands.

• **Counter Throw:** Directing an attacker's momentum against him, the martial artist sends him flying into the nearest wall... or the ground... or worse. A basic soft-style maneuver, this remains an effective technique. When the martial artist is attacked, make a resisted roll of Dexterity + Martial Arts against the attacker's Dexterity + Brawl, Melee, or Martial Arts (depending on the Ability that the opponent is using to attack). If you score more successes than your attacker does, then you deflect the attack and may – immediately and without having to divide up your dice pool – try to ***throw*** him (as below). If you fail the throw, you still sidestep his attack.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1, Athletics 1 (soft style)

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 6

Damage: As *Throw* **Actions:** 1

• **Death Strike:** Aiming a rigid hand at an organ, joint, or other incapacitating location, the attacker directs devastating force at that target. This strike inflicts lethal damage.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 3 (hard style)

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 5

Damage: Strength +2/L **Actions:** 1

• **Deflecting Block:** Evading an attacker's blow, the martial artist redirects the attacker's force against her. In game terms, the defender rolls Dexterity + Martial Arts in ***Phase Two: Defense***. Each success subtracts one success from the attacker's roll. If the defender scores more successes than his attacker, then the attacker must roll Dexterity (difficulty 8) or else fall to the ground (or smash into a nearby surface), taking her own Strength in bashing damage.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 2 (soft style), Athletics or Acrobatics 2

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 6

Damage: Attacker's Strength/B **Actions:** 1

• **Dragon Tail Sweep:** A spinning leg sweep that knocks an opponent sprawling. In game terms, the effects work like a throw, but the martial artist doesn't need to grab her opponent first.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1 (hard style), Athletics or Acrobatics 1

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: Opponent's Strength/B **Actions:** 1

• **Elbow/ Knee Strike:** A quick, brutal blow with an elbow or kneecap, usually directed at a vulnerable spot at close range.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1 (any style)

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 5

Damage: Strength +1/B **Actions:** 1

• **Flying Kick:** Leaping through the air, the martial artist combines her body weight and momentum into a powerful blow.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1 (hard style), Athletics or Acrobatics 1

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Strength +2/B **Actions:** 1

• **Hard Strike/ Soft Strike:** Here's a basic combat blow, focused with more skill than a wild punch. The hard variant involves a clenched fist or rigid fingers (the Tiger Claw technique), whereas a soft blow typically involves tripping the opponent or otherwise using his own force to hurt him.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1 (any style)

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** hard 5/ soft 6

Damage: Strength +1/B **Actions:** 1

• **Joint Lock:** Having already grappled his opponent, the martial artist applies pressure to joints and pressure points. If he chooses to exert force against that spot, he can dislocate or break limbs, joints, or possibly even the neck.

The player rolls Dexterity + Martial Arts to grapple his opponent (see ***Grapple***, above), then may immediately (without dividing his dice pool between attacks) roll Dexterity + Martial Arts to inflict damage. Each success rolled inflicts one health level's worth of lethal injury.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 2 (any style), Athletics or Acrobatics 2

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 5

Damage: Successes/L **Actions:** 1

• **Nerve/ Pressure Point Strike:** Targeting a vital location, the martial artist directs precision force against it. If the attacker scores at least three successes to hit his opponent, then the opponent must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 8) or else be stunned on the next turn. A botch on that roll stuns her for three turns instead.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 3 (any style)

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Strength +3/B **Actions:** 1

• **Snake Step:** Shifting away from the blow, our martial artist deftly sidesteps a close or ranged attack. Naturally, he must be able to see it coming first. A successful roll acts as a dodge attempt with an additional three-dice bonus.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1 (any style), Athletics or Acrobatics 1

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** hard 6/soft 5

Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

• **Snap Kick:** Focusing her energy on a simple yet effective kick, the martial artist directs her lower body strength into the blow.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 1 (hard style)

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 5

Damage: Strength +1/B **Actions:** 1

• **Spinning Kick:** Our martial artist spins around and plants a solid kick into the object of his attention.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts 2 (hard style), Athletics or Acrobatics 2

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 6

Damage: Strength +3/B **Actions:** 1

• **Throw:** Having grappled her opponent (or used a ***counter throw***, above), the martial artist slams him into a convenient surface. In game terms, the attacker needs a Dexterity + Martial Arts dice pool equal to, or higher than, her opponent's Dexterity. With a successful roll, the martial artist can throw her opponent up to one yard for each success she scores on her attack roll.

So long as she's got a straight shot at the location, she can choose where her opponent lands. When he lands, he takes damage based on her strength. If he'd been charging her at the time he was thrown, the impact also inflicts an additional +1 die for every 10 feet he'd been traveling at the time (+10 dice maximum).

If the impact inflicts more than three health levels in damage (after soaking), the opponent must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 8) or else be stunned for one turn.

Should the martial artist throw one opponent into another one, the flying enemy inflicts one die bashing damage for each point of Stamina he has, plus one additional die for the momentum and impact if one or both of the opponents were moving at the time. (A Stamina 3 bad guy, for example, who'd just run 20 feet before being thrown would inflict five dice of bashing damage on his buddy.) Throwing one opponent into another one adds +2 to the roll's difficulty for that throw, but it does indeed smash two birds with one throw.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts (any style) 2

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** hard 7/ soft 6

Damage: Strength + movement/B **Actions:** 1

• **Thunder Kick:** A devastating flying kick. Hurling himself through the air, the martial artist focuses his chi and mass into a strike potent enough to end most fights immediately. In game terms, each success adds one additional die to the kick's damage. A character cannot use the Thunder Kick more than once every five turns, however, as it demands intense focus and commitment to the blow.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts (hard style) 3, Athletics or Acrobatics 2

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Strength +3 + successes/B **Actions:** 1

• **Vital Strike:** A sharp-handed blow to an organ or joint inflicts lethal injury.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts (hard style) 2

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Strength/L **Actions:** 1

• **Withering Grasp:** Grabbing his foe in a painful hold, the martial artist inflicts damage and may disarm her as well. To get the weapon from an enemy's hand, the martial artist must score at least three successes; with five successes, he can take it away from her and use it himself in a following turn.

Minimum Ability: Martial Arts (soft style) 3

Roll: Dexterity + Martial Arts **Difficulty:** 7

Damage: Strength/B **Actions:** 1

Do

The quintessential martial art from which all other disciplines supposedly descend, Do is far more than a mere collection of fighting techniques. As shown by its Trait listing in **Chapter Six**, Do is a way of life... or, more literally, *the Way* of life. When directed toward peaceful ends, Do allows a person to refine enormous potential. And when directed, by sad necessity, toward the ends of violence, Do is legendary in its martial applications.

Commitment, Training, and Fighting Prowess

As revealed in **Chapter Six**, a starting character cannot begin play with more than two dots in Do. Further expertise must be earned over the course of the game. Only Akashics and their closest, most trusted allies may learn it, and that discipline is a lifetime commitment. A *Tao-shih* (Way-scholar/warrior) must spend *at least one hour every day* practicing Do; otherwise, his skills diminish. In game terms, he loses dots temporarily until regular training resumes – roughly one dot for every two weeks without practice.

Game system-wise, Do confers the following advantages and limitations to its practitioners:

- **Secret Teachings:** Only the most skilled Akashayana may teach the secrets of Do. In game terms, a character must have no fewer than three dots in Do, and must be a member (or at least a *former* member) of the Akashic Tradition, in order to train a student in this Art. A teacher can pass on one fighting maneuver for each dot of Do she possesses, plus one more for each dot in her Intelligence Trait. Also, a student cannot learn Do without also studying the eight limbs of Do. (See below.) The Way involves more than simply punching rocks.

- **Flexibility:** A Do-using character may employ any of the general or martial arts combat maneuvers, assuming that he has at least one dot in Do for every dot in Martial Arts he would need for that maneuver. He *cannot* employ dirty fighting techniques, however – they're brutal, undisciplined, and inharmonious.

- **Precision:** When employing general combat maneuvers, a Do-using character subtracts -1 from the usual difficulty; a punch, for instance, would be difficulty 5, not 6. When

Kuei Lung Chuan: Dragon Spirit Kung Fu

The secret discipline of the Wu Lung Tiger School, Dragon Spirit Kung Fu features broad, powerful movements that combine the fury of a tiger with the grace of a dragon. In game terms, Kuei Lung Chuan is a hard style, flashy and grandiose, that encourages a passionate approach to life and war.

To reflect Kuei Lung Chuan, a character from the Wu Lung – and *only* from the Wu Lung! – may take a Martial Arts specialty in this form. As usual, that character can learn up to two maneuvers for each dot in the Martial Arts Trait and will have several dots in Acrobatics and Melee as well.

The Spirit Dragon style concentrates on several weapons: the jian sword, the spear, the staff, and the war fan. A Tiger School martial artist can take a Kuei Lung Chuan specialty in Melee to count every 10 rolled with that Ability as *two* successes, not just one. Taking the same specialty in Acrobatics allows the martial artist to get those extra successes while employing his Tiger School training in his acrobatic feats. Together, these advantages reflect the grand discipline of Spirit Dragon Kung Fu. **(For details, see *Specialties* in Chapter Six, p. 274.)**

Kuei Lung Chuan emphasizes certain techniques. A character trained by the Tiger School will have at least two of the following maneuvers in addition to whichever other attacks he decides to learn, and upper-level devotees will have most, if not all, of these techniques: *Death Strike, Dragon Tail Sweep, Hard Strike, Snake Step, Thunder Kick,* and *Withering Grasp*. The Dragon Wizards, of course, often use their secret kung fu art as a mystic focus, too.

using maneuvers from Do or the Martial Arts Ability, however, the normal difficulties apply. This benefit is also known as the ***well-trained advantage***, as per the **Revised** edition **Tradition Book: Akashic Brotherhood**.

- **Martial Mastery:** The player may select two martial arts maneuvers for every dot the character has in Do, plus one special Do technique (below) for every dot above the first. A character with both Do *and* Martial Arts may add all of his maneuvers together, resulting in a veritable Bruce Lee.

- **Differences in Mastery:** If the character has both Do *and* Martial Arts, however, the player uses Dexterity + Martial Arts for the maneuvers she acquired through the Martial Arts Ability, and Dexterity + Do for those she learned through Do. This reflects the difference between normal fighting arts and the refined path of Do. Being a black belt in tae kwon do will not automatically make you a Do master as soon as you begin learning that specialized Way! Once the Do Trait is higher than the Martial Arts Trait, though, simply use Do for all combat maneuver dice pools.

- **Lethal Damage:** Thanks to Do's intense focus and precision, unarmed attacks inflict lethal damage. The Akashic may choose to use bashing damage instead, however, if he'd rather not kill his opponent. Switching between bashing and lethal modes is a reflexive action that can be declared at any time before the player rolls to hit.

- **Hardened Defense:** An unarmed Do practitioner can block Brawl or Melee attacks that cause lethal damage. Either the devotee has hardened her limbs to deflect killing blows, or she's so adept at avoiding harm that she can simply deflect the strike or catch a weapon between her palms. This ability, however, cannot be used to stop projectiles or bullets, though special Do techniques allow practitioners to do that as well. (See below.)

Note: The basic Do maneuvers presented in **The Book of Shadows** and **Sorcerers Crusade** have been replaced in **Mage 20** by all of the advantages above. A troupe that wishes to use the older Do maneuvers must choose either those maneuvers or the newer rules above. You can't use both, although the ***Typhoon Kick*** and ***Hurricane Throw***, below, both allow old maneuvers under the new rules as special Do techniques.

The Eight Limbs of Do

Far more than mere super kung fu, Do also includes study in the *eight limbs*, or fields of study, that epitomize a well-focused life. The nearby sidebar reveals those eight limbs. To progress within Do, a devotee must study those limbs as well as the martial applications of that Art.

In game terms, you must have at least two dots in limb-related Abilities *other than Dharmamukti* for every dot in Do. Before you can add another dot of Do, you must first add two other dots in limb-related fields. To go, for example, from Do 2 to Do 3, your character would also have to learn at least two dots in one of the Abilities on the sidebar. Ideally, he'll eventually learn at least one dot in all eight limbs.

Special Do Techniques

Beyond the martial prowess and its associated skills, the Way also teaches its devotees an array of secret techniques. Some get integrated into the established Arts of what mages call magick – that is, Do becomes the focus for Sphere-based Effects. Other techniques, however, remain the special purview of the Akashayana.

A devotee of Do may learn one of these techniques for each dot of Do he has beyond the first; if, for instance, Xiao Mengli achieves Do 4, she can choose up to three special techniques. Such disciplines are the work of devoted study and many years of practice. No one, obviously, can master them all!

Eight Limbs of Expertise

According to the Akashic *Dharma Sutra*, the Way is divided into eight fields of expertise. And although Do is often regarded as a martial art, its devotees recognize that a truly harmonious human being understands at least a little bit about all of them.

These eight limbs are known as:

- **Dharmamukti:** Unarmed combat techniques of the Dharma Clasped Hand. Both adapting and inspiring other martial arts techniques, this limb comprises the most obvious form of Do, but only one of its many applications.

  Associated Abilities: Alertness, Athletics, Do

- **Dhyana:** The Limb of Meditation, focused upon calming an excitable mind. Refined as a way to escape the clutches of egotism and attachment, Dhyana employs mandalas, the Five Asian Elements, meditative movement practices, and the greater realm beyond Self.

  Associated Abilities: Awareness, Enigmas, Meditation

- **Jivahasta:** The Hand of Life, a study of healing arts and bodywork.

  Associated Abilities: Esoterica (Bodywork, Herbalism, Yoga) Medicine (Alternate Healing Techniques), Survival

- **Karma:** Devotion to humble labor, the perfect focus of small things, and one's place within an infinite cosmos, epitomized by the saying, "*Before enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water.*"

  Associated Abilities: Art (all kinds), Crafts (all non-martial specialties), Etiquette

- **Prajna:** The study of ethics and philosophy. Just as a devotee of the Way refines his body for war, he must also refine his mind with kindness, compassion, and the stillness of perfect harmony.

  Associated Abilities: Academics (Philosophy), Belief Systems, Cosmology

- **Shastamarga:** The Way of Weapons, intended to expand bodily awareness into the tools that extend the body's reach. By focusing on weapons, the craftsmanship involved, and the awful consequences of their use and abuse, a devotee learns to judge the implications of her own actions upon the greater whole.

  Associated Abilities: Academics (Strategy), Crafts (Weaponsmithing), Melee

- **Sunyakaya:** The Limb of the Empty Body, cultivating the ability to disappear. Based as it is upon the removal of ego through the concealment of identity, this limb has more practical uses as well.

  Associated Abilities: Meditation, Stealth, Subterfuge

- **Tricanmarga:** The Way of the Triple Struggle, balancing out the forces of Dynamism, Stasis, and Entropy (seen as Tiger, Phoenix, and Dragon) within one's own self and then – by extension – reaching greater harmony with the world beyond that self.

  Associated Abilities: Acrobatics, Athletics, Esoterica (Body Control, Yoga)

Optional Rule: The Peaceful Way

Do is not merely a martial art. By applying the Way to peaceful tasks, a Tao-shih may focus its principles to great success. In story terms, the Akashic character meditates upon the Way as he performs whatever task he has set his mind to doing.

In game terms, the player spends one Willpower point and then rolls his Do Trait as a dice pool against difficulty 8. Each success he rolls adds one success to a mundane task associated with one of the eight limbs listed above. To perform the task itself, the player rolls the associated Attribute + Ability, at whatever difficulty seems to fit the task at hand.

Only the Associated Abilities listed above may be enhanced by this *optional rule*, with the exceptions of Do combat maneuvers and the Abilities associated with the Shastamarga limb. Such violent tasks *do not* get the benefit of this rule; this is, after all, the *Peaceful* Way, and so martial applications are not appropriate to its purity.

• **Arrow Cutting:** With blinding speed, the Tao-shih catches arrows and other projectile weapons (no bullets), knocks them out of the air, and sometimes even throws them back at her attackers. At difficulty 7, the devotee can deflect an incoming missile of arrow speed or slower; at difficulty 9, she can catch it and throw it back with her next action.

Roll: Dexterity + Do **Difficulty:** 7/9
Damage: As Weapon **Actions:** 1

• **Hurricane Throw:** The remarkable power of Do allows a practitioner to catch or grab his opponent and then throw her with incredible force. Essentially, this is a typical martial arts throw with the damage and difficulty listed below; each success, however, adds one die

Mage Trick: Catching Bullets

By adding a Time 3/ Forces 2/ Life 2 **Bullet-Catch** Effect to the ***Arrow Cutting*** feat, an Akashic character can catch bullets. Forces reduces the bullet's kinetic energy, Life hardens the skin against the projectile, and Time quickens the Akashic's reflexes to incredible speed.

To perform this trick, an Akashic mage who's aware of the attack can cast the Effect, focus it through Do, and then roll her Dexterity + Do as if it was a dodge against the gunfire. If she scores more successes than her attacker, then she catches the bullet before it can hit her. Whether or not this is vulgar magick depends on where she is; in most places, it would be vulgar, but in regions that accept a superhuman martial arts paradigm, it's coincidental.

This feat does *not* work against shotguns or rapid fire weapons. Although a mage could certainly pull a *Matrix*-style vulgar stunt in order to stop a hail of bullets, that's a different kind of trick.

to the Hurricane Throw's damage pool. This damage, unlike that of other unarmed attacks, is not lethal... though it can be *quite* significant.

Roll: Dexterity + Do **Difficulty:** 8
Damage: Strength +3 + successes/B **Actions:** 1

• **Iron Shirt:** Through intense conditioning and focused chi, a practitioner can withstand terrible blows. In game terms, he gains one bonus soak die for every dot he has in Do. Although this Iron Shirt cannot soak lethal damage **(unless you're using the *Cinematic Damage* option, p. 412)**, it can grant fantastic stamina to a practitioner of Do.

Sadly, this technique does not confer total protection from harm. The character will always take one health level of damage from a blow that exceeds her Stamina Trait. If Lucy Hark gets hit for five levels of damage and she has a Stamina of 2, then she'll still take one health level from that attack, despite her Iron Shirt technique.

Roll: Adds Do Trait to soak roll **Difficulty: N/A**
Damage: N/A **Actions:** none

• **Kiaijutsu:** Also known as the *Iron Shout*, kiaijutsu channels the practitioner's chi through his voice, granting him phenomenal powers of intimidation and force. Once per combat, the Akashic may focus his inner energy into a terrifying *kiai*, which may have one of the following effects:

Stamina: The Tao-shih may toughen himself against blows, giving himself a three-turn Stamina bonus of one dot for every success in a Stamina + Do roll (difficulty 7).

Terror: He can frighten his enemies by rolling Manipulation + Do (difficulty is the target's Willpower +3). Each success adds a +1 difficulty to the target's next action, to a maximum of +3 difficulty. If the devotee's successes exceed the target's Willpower, that enemy is either stunned into immobility for a turn or so, or else driven to flee. Against several weak-willed opponents (Willpower 4 or less), the Iron Shout causes one enemy to flee for every success rolled.

Eloquence: Channeling his power toward a softer voice, he may hold the Shout in and fill his words with ferocious energy. In this case, he rolls Charisma + Do (difficulty 8), and each success adds one success to his next Expression, Leadership, Intimidation, or performance-based Art roll.

In any application, the player must state his intention to use the Shout at the beginning of his action, or else hold back a few dice to use the Shout as a second action that turn.

Roll: As above **Difficulty:** 7/ Willpower +3/ 8
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

• **Plum Flower Blossom:** Through intense balance training on stumps, pillars, and poles, an Akashic learns to perform incredible feats of acrobatic prowess. By rolling Dexterity + Do (difficulty 6), a practitioner may either double her jumping distance or bounce from object to object for one turn, plus another turn for every two successes scored.

If one of those leaps gets used as an attack, the difficulty rises by +1 but adds two extra damage dice to that attack. Leaping and attacking are still considered two different actions, so it demands the usual divided dice pool. Especially if it's enhanced by the Correspondence and/ or Forces Spheres, the Plum Flower technique can be quite amazing.

Roll: Dexterity + Do **Difficulty:** 6
Damage: N/A **Actions:** 1

• **Soft Fist:** Also known as *Jou Chuan* or the *Redirection* technique, the Soft Fist guides a hand-to-hand attack back against those who wish to harm the devotee. If the Akashic using this technique scores more successes than his attacker, he catches the blow and sends it into a nearby character – probably the one who attacked him, or possibly a different enemy.

Damage-wise, Jou Chuan inflicts the attacker's Strength + weapon, plus one die for every success scored by the Akashic character beyond what he needed to catch the attack. If, for instance, Raging Eagle needs three successes to catch his opponent's attack, and he gets six successes, then the redirected attack inflicts the opponent's Strength + weapon + three more dice.

Roll: Dexterity + Do **Difficulty:** 7
Damage: As above **Actions:** 1

• **Ten Thousand Weapons:** In the hands of an especially skillful Warring Fist, *anything* becomes a weapon. With this technique, the Tao-shih can use any object – a coin, a wallet, a newspaper, whatever – to inflict damage. If the object isn't normally a weapon, it deals out one die of bashing damage for every dot in the character's Do Trait; if it's a weapon that normally inflicts bashing damage, it does lethal damage; and if it normally does lethal damage, it inflicts one extra die of damage when this character employs it.

Roll: Dexterity + Do **Difficulty:** N/A
Damage: As above **Actions:** 1

• **Typhoon Kick:** Perhaps the most devastating strike in the Akashic technique arsenal, the Typhoon Kick directs chi, momentum, and supreme focus into a blow that can shatter stone and kill most human beings. Like the martial arts maneuver ***Thunder Kick***, this attack requires absolute concentration and may be done no more than once every five turns. The practitioner can choose to use either bashing or lethal damage with this kick. If she directs it against a solid object (a car, wall, stone elemental, etc.), or a character who manages to soak all the damage, then she must also make a successful soak roll or else take half of the damage, rounded down, herself. (A successful soak roll means no damage.)

Roll: Dexterity + Do **Difficulty:** 8

Damage: Strength +5 + successes **Actions:** 1

• **Weapon Art:** Applying the mastery of Do into the use of hand-to-hand weaponry, a devotee can use certain weapons with brilliant efficiency. In game terms, the character gets one familiar weapon for every dot he has in the Melee Trait; with those weapons only, he reduces the normal difficulty by -1. If the weapon normally does bashing damage, the Akashic may inflict lethal damage with it instead. He may also use the ***Arrow Cutting*** technique with those weapons as well, though he cannot use a weapon to catch projectiles.

In order to employ this technique, the devotee must have a Dexterity + Do dice pool that's at least as high as his Dexterity + Melee pool, if not higher. This technique *does not apply* to guns, though it may be used with bows or thrown weapons.

Roll: As per attack **Difficulty:** N/A

Damage: As above **Actions:** N/A

Magickal Duels

When allied mages need to hash out a dispute, normal combat will not do. Although the time-honored rituals of non-fatal dueling, wrestling matches, martial arts sparring contests, and so on remain popular in certain groups, mages – especially ones from a mystic background – prefer Arts over force when it comes to dueling techniques.

Contests

When a graceful display of superiority seems sufficient to resolve a dispute, the antagonists could share a *contest*. Pitting their skills against one another, these rivals choose a field of battle to find out which is the better mage. Depending on the group, dispute, and antagonists in question, this could take one of a number of forms. Here are a few suggestions:

- A chess match
- A riddle contest
- A race (either on foot, in vehicles, or through magickal methods like flight or teleportation)
- An insult contest or bragging competition
- A juried argument of theories or some similar debate (popular among Etherites, Hermetics, Choristers, Solificati, Progenitors, and other cerebral sects)
- A challenge of physical might, agility, endurance, or fearlessness (favored among witches, shamans, street-folks, and martial artists)
- A psychic clash of wills (especially prevalent among mages who favor mental and spiritual discipline)
- Sports matches (pretty much anyone)
- Invention contests (a technomancer favorite)
- Scavenger hunts
- Crime sprees
- Shape-changing rivalries
- Acquisition contests (Syndicate reps love this one)
- Debauchery dares
- Battles of the bands

All of these contests play out through a combination of imaginative roleplaying and a few rolls off the ***Dramatic Feats chart*** near the beginning of this chapter. Social, physical, and art-and-science feats work best for this sort of thing, with the rolls based on the tasks that the duelists agree upon as a field of battle. Those feats tend to be decided by either extended rolls (to see who gets the most successes first, as in a race) or extended and resisted rolls (to see whose skill and luck prevails, as in games or physical confrontations).

In any contest, the disputants agree upon stakes beforehand, with the winner and loser settling their grudge once the contest has been won. Meanwhile, each side will probably pick out several witnesses and associated seconds to assure a fair and official resolution with – one hopes – a minimum of cheating.

Ordeals

Ancient customs dared rivals to settle their disputes through trial by ordeal: both rivals undertake a painful experience, and the one who gives up first loses the dispute. Handling hot irons; enduring intense heat or cold; retrieving objects from deep underwater without diving gear; suffering consensual torture or body modification without crying out; pitting one's self against wild animals, insects, or spirits... all these ordeals, and many others, have places of honor in various cultures. And though modern mages often consider themselves too civilized (read: *chicken*) to submit to such challenges, willworkers who cherish physical and spiritual vitality – shamans, witches, extreme athletes, martial artists, Ecstatics, Thanatoics, and other people who venerate tribal cultures – tackle such ordeals gladly.

In game terms, the players again utilize the ***Dramatic Feats chart***, this time favoring the ***Physical Feats table***. ***Resistance*** really comes into its own here, as it reflects a character's ability to withstand pain and fatigue. Again, use extended rolls... extended and resisted, if the duelists are inflicting the ordeal upon one another. The Storyteller might require Willpower rolls as well,

especially for ordeals that involve courage in the face of personal fears or spectacular demise. The ***Environmental Hazards*** section features the effects of unfortunate conditions and terrain. Regardless of the ordeal's specifics, both duelists will probably suffer damage, too... probably bashing, often lethal, and perhaps even aggravated. By the time the challenge gets resolved, the duelists might need significant healing, recuperation, or both.

Flame Wars and Core Wars

A variation on the previous dueling styles pits netizens (often, but not always, Virtual Adepts) against each other in online duels or ordeals. In this case, the same systems used above come into play, but the feats are social and intellectual rather than physical. As the duel rages, the antagonists might need to make Willpower rolls – either extended (as when facing taunts and scorn), or extended and resisted (as when they're tearing into one another's self-esteem). Losers sacrifice temporary points of Willpower, and winners become the Last Ego Standing.

The Core War

In a *core war* – an Internet dueling tradition favored by the Virtual Adepts – each disputing party sets up a Quintessence-pool server core that has been partitioned outside the Digital Web as a whole, to prevent widespread infections from the coming duel.

Once the duel begins, the antagonists write virus programs (Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 8) to attack the other servers. In the process, they invest a part of themselves into the virus by energizing it with a point of Quintessence from their personal energy – in game terms, from the Quintessence Trait. As with the classical certámen style described below, these servers and viruses can take imaginative forms; Quintessence servers might be built like dungeon levels, cinematic landscapes, maze-like offices, pan-dimensional labyrinths, complex mandalas, and so forth. The viruses can look like fantasy adventure heroes, cartoon characters, insectoid invaders, angry birds, disgruntled office workers, geometric storms, and so forth... all of which reflect the personalities of the people conducting the duel.

As the duel begins, the viruses get sent off to attack the cores. Power-ups along the way – power pills, medical kits, pools of water or fire, etc. – can fuel and upgrade the virus warriors during the attack. With those power-ups, the duelists upgrade their viral champions by spending another point of personal Quintessence. In game terms, these points let a duelist change tactics or lower the difficulty of her attack.

As the core war continues, the duelists make extended and resisted rolls. Generally, that roll involves Intelligence + Computer, as mentioned above. A duelist might change his tactics, though, by making new rolls with different Traits – say, Wits + Enigmas, Wits + Computer, Perception + Cryptography, etc. Each change of rolls requires a Quintessence point, but the change can adjust the dice pool to favor a duelist's strengths. The first duelist to score 25 successes breaches the core and wins the war... and gets the Quintessence that went into making that core, as well.

Because core warriors invest their essence into their viruses and cores, they take damage from the battle. Each failed roll indicates a death for the virus, which inflicts an automatic level of bashing damage on the duelist and requires a new point of

Quintessence so that the virus can respawn. A botched roll inflicts lethal damage instead, as the death backlashes on the duelist as system shock. Although core wars to the death are rare, such duelists *do* occasionally die. Y'know those stories about computer game enthusiasts found dead in their chairs, the console or keyboard clutched in their hands? Now you know what *really* happened...

Variations on flame and core wars involve hacking challenges (with systems as ***Contests***, above) or virtual combat; for the latter rules, see the section on ***The Digital Web*** later in this chapter. More recently, however, both the Virtual Adepts and other activist mages have favored the most productive sort of duel...

The Reality Challenge

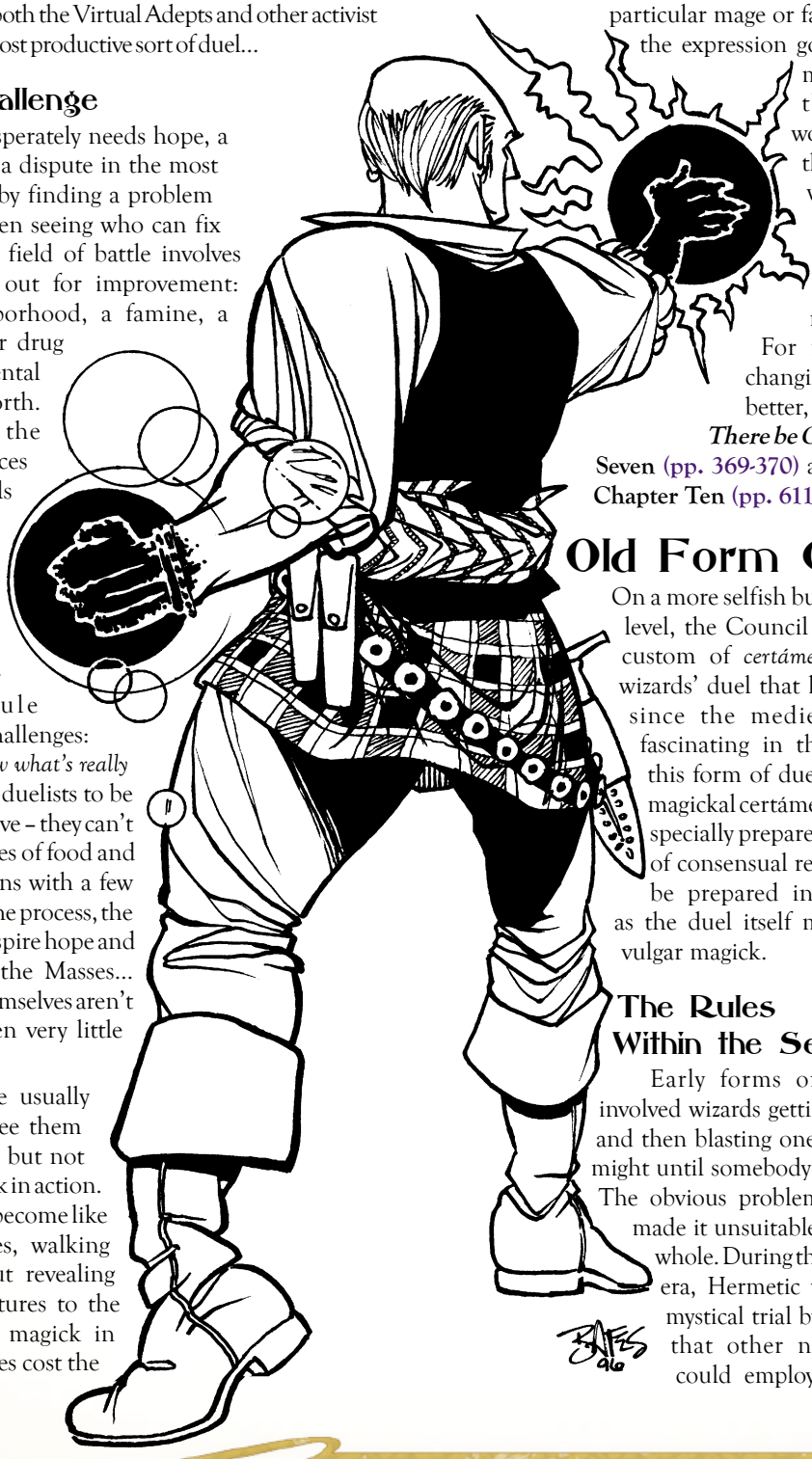
In a world that desperately needs hope, a *reality challenge* resolves a dispute in the most altruistic way possible: by finding a problem among the Sleepers, then seeing who can fix it best. Essentially, the field of battle involves a situation that cries out for improvement: a crime-ridden neighborhood, a famine, a slave trafficking ring or drug cartel war, an environmental catastrophe, and so forth. A third party picks the situation and then places a certain number of goals that must be fulfilled as victory conditions. The winning duelist is the one who manages to meet the most goals within the time required.

One major rule dominates all reality challenges: *the Sleepers must not know what's really going on*. This forces the duelists to be clever, subtle, and secretive – they can't simply fly in with bundles of food and wipe out warring factions with a few well-tossed fireballs. In the process, the contestants must also inspire hope and self-sufficiency among the Masses... after all, if the people themselves aren't inspired to change, then very little has actually improved.

Dueling mages are usually allowed to let people see them and interact with them but not to directly witness magick in action. Essentially, the duelists become like angels, gods, or heroes, walking among mortals without revealing their powerful true natures to the people. Overt acts of magick in front of Sleeper witnesses cost the offending mage one goal per incident (as well as any Paradox incurred!), and a Paradox backlash forfeits the duel.

Because a reality challenge benefits humanity as a whole without tilting the paradigm over a cliff, both mystics and Technocrats can share a reality challenge with one another. According to legend, such duels originated during the European late Middle Ages, the Red Turbans War in China... or perhaps both, or maybe neither. Warring factions would work to improve the lot of the common people, which in time became a suitable test for a faction's virtue. After all, went the reasoning, if a particular mage or faction could win – as the expression goes – the hearts and minds of the people, then Reality itself would be the judge of that mage or faction's worthiness.

In game terms, a reality challenge is a story hook, not a series of rolls. For more details about changing the world for the better, see ***Ascension: Can There be Only One?*** in **Chapter Seven** (pp. 369-370) and ***Reality Zones*** in **Chapter Ten** (pp. 611-617).



Old Form Certámen

On a more selfish but literally Traditional level, the Council has its longstanding custom of *certámen* – the formalized wizards' duel that has resolved disputes since the medieval era. Rare but fascinating in the new millennium, this form of dueling involves a large, magickal certámen circle inscribed in a specially prepared ritual space outside of consensual reality. This circle *must* be prepared in a Horizon Realm, as the duel itself manifests exceedingly vulgar magick.

The Rules Within the Setting

Early forms of certámen usually involved wizards getting into a ritual circle and then blasting one another with mystic might until somebody surrendered or died. The obvious problems with this method made it unsuitable for the Council as a whole. During the Grand Convocation era, Hermetic wizards refined their mystical trial by combat into a form that other non-Hermetic mages could employ, preferably without

killing one another. After decades of adjustment, the Traditions arrived at a ritualized duel method that drained Quintessence without inflicting physical or psychological injury. This legal form of certámen became the official method for resolving disputes. Although old school-wizards continue to duel with other methods as well, the sword-and-shield form of certámen has been the legal standard since the mid-1500s.

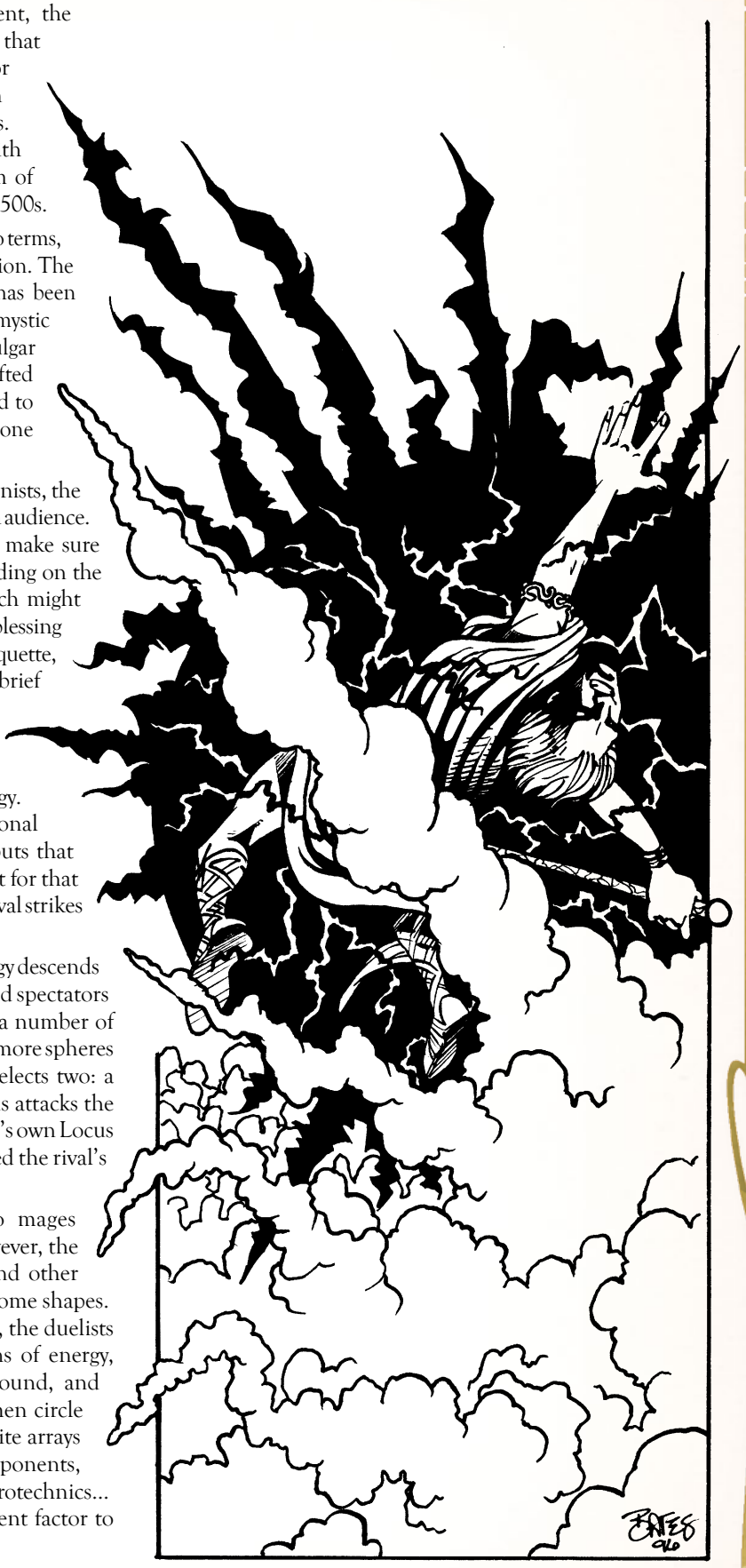
In official certámen matches, each party agrees to terms, putting up a stake as the prize for the duel in question. The rivals then enter a specially prepared circle that has been configured to shape, confine, and channel the mystic energies involved. Due to those spectacularly vulgar energies, all official certámen circles must be crafted within Horizon Realms; the few mages who've tried to wage such duels on Earth have been theatrically undone by massive Paradox displays.

A certámen match features at least two antagonists, the circle, one to three *Certámen Marshalls*, and usually an audience. The Marshalls enforce the proper protocols and make sure that all sides abide by the duel's outcome. Depending on the antagonists and circumstances involved, the match might open with an elaborate ritual – invocation of spirits, blessing of contestants, reading of charges, observation of etiquette, reciting of titles, pre-duel bragging, and so forth – a brief introduction, or a simple command: "*Fight*."

During the pre-duel ceremonies, each combatant channels all her Quintessence into a single *Locus*: a large sphere or pool of shining energy. If a mage has Tass or receives a loan of additional Quintessence from her allies for the duel, she puts that into her Locus as well. The Locus provides a target for that duel. Rather than attacking the mage herself, the rival strikes at her opponent's Locus instead.

Once the match begins, a dome of mystic energy descends over the arena in order to protect the Marshalls and spectators from errant energies. Each antagonist manifests a number of glowing spheres; the more powerful the mage, the more spheres he manifests. From among them, each duelist selects two: a *Gladius* (sword) and an *Aegis* (shield). The Gladius attacks the opponent's Locus, and the Aegis defends the mage's own Locus from similar attacks. When one duelist has drained the rival's Quintessence from his Locus, the match ends.

A no-frills certámen match features two mages slinging spheres at one another. More often, however, the antagonists craft their Gladius, Aegis, Locus, and other spheres into elaborate, theatrical, and often fearsome shapes. Guiding mystic energies with willful imagination, the duelists forge wild weapons, ferocious creatures, curtains of energy, elemental tempests, titanic shields, bursts of sound, and whatever else the mage can imagine. The certámen circle allows its duelists to will their energies into infinite arrays of form. A certámen match between two skilled opponents, then, can be an incredible display of occult pyrotechnics... which, for spectators, adds a serious entertainment factor to otherwise solemn procedures.



Dueling Systems

Assuming that the duelists meet in such a space, the duel itself employs the following systems:

- **Manifesting Spheres:** Once the duelists meet inside the circle, they manifest one glowing sphere for each point of Arete the characters possess; a duelist with Arete 6, for instance, can manifest up to six glowing spheres. Only two of these spheres can be used at a time; the rest get kept in reserve, though they can also present an intimidating edge (below).

  These glowing spheres represent the mage's excellence (her Arete Trait), not her expertise (her Spheres Trait). Thus, an Arete 5 duelist can conjure up to five glowing spheres, even if she has dots in only three Spheres on her character sheet.

- **Gladius and Aegis:** Each combatant takes one glowing sphere as his Gladius (sword), and another as his Aegis (shield). The first attacks; the other defends. In this case, the spheres chosen *are* two of the mage's Sphere Traits – typically the ones with the highest ratings. Each duelist gets to decide which Sphere he wants to use for which position, and those decisions reflect a combatant's tactical priorities.

- **Locus:** Each combatant also manifests all of his or her Quintessence (and probably Tass as well) into a single glowing Locus. The first duelist to drain all of her opponent's Quintessence from the Locus wins.

- **Initiative and Tactics:** The duel then moves into three-second turns. Each turn, the duelists roll initiative, and may choose – each turn – to select one of the following dice pools as the basis for their initiative rating (p. 399):

  - Dexterity + Arete (reflecting speed)
  - Wits + Arete (reflecting quick-wittedness)
  - Willpower (reflecting sheer force of will)

  Each duelist may change initiative dice at the beginning of a new turn, reflecting a shift of tactics.

- **Attack:** Each turn, each duelist gets to attack. The player with the highest initiative attacks first, and the lower initiative attacks second.

  The attacker rolls her Wits + Gladius Sphere *or* her Dexterity + Gladius Sphere against a difficulty of the defender's Aegis Sphere + 3. (Aegis Life 3, for example, would be difficulty 6.) The attacker may divide her dice pool or employ Time 3 magick in order to attack several times within a single turn. Using Time 3 to slow your opponent down, however, is forbidden by certámen etiquette; a combatant who attempts this tactic automatically loses the duel.

- **Damage and Soaking:** Each success scored by the attacker drains one point of Quintessence from the defender's Locus and transfers it to her own Locus. The defender can try to soak this damage by rolling his Prime rating against difficulty 6; each success deducts one success from the attacker's total.

- **Victory:** The first duelist to drain his or her opponent's Quintessence Locus wins the certámen match.

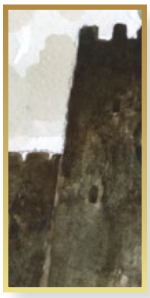
Shaping the Spheres

The number of glowing certámen spheres reflects a character's Arete Trait rating, but the Gladius and Aegis reflect the character's actual Sphere Traits. When they first appear, these glowing spheres are simply balls of energy that look like whatever the mage wants them to look like. The Gladius and Aegis, however, embody the principle of their respective Spheres; Correspondence could look like a quivering warp in space, whereas Entropy resembles a black hole or ghostly face, Forces conjures a ball of wind or fire, Life creates a green sphere of humid energy, and so forth.

Once the glowing spheres get conjured, however, creative duelists (and players) can shape them into whatever forms they wish to present. That Correspondence warp could become a polydimensional fractal sword or a coruscating hole in space. Entropy might shape itself into a ghastly skeleton-thing with an obsidian scythe or rip open a portal to an apparent hell. Forces could swirl into tempests, and Life could turn into dragons or other mythic creatures. Within the certámen circle, the possibilities are limited only by each duelist's imagination. These shapes are purely cosmetic – a Life 3 Gladius is a Life 3 Gladius even if it looks like a giant, tentacled eye-creature – but they can be pretty damned intimidating and display each duelist's creativity as well. Seasoned duelists might be known for their evocative weaponry, and these old pros probably have signature shapes for their Gladius and Aegis Spheres.

The other glowing spheres and the Locus can be reshaped as well. A really showy combatant might conjure a chorus of dancing sphere-imps, a Locus made of shimmering liquid fire, a Gladius like a flaming demon sword, and an Aegis like a black mirror filled with sneering faces. Stylish certámen spheres can provide extra entertainment for the crowd that inevitably attends a certámen match. Although the old dueling masters are more or less history in the current age, tales still recall the mind-wrenching geometry of Caeron Mustai's abstract designs, the lusty grace of Marianna's sensual artistry, and the awful force of Porthos Fitz-Empress's elemental certámen arsenal. Sure, a dueling mage *could* simply conjure shimmering balls of energy, and leave the theatrics to her egotistical peers... but really, where's the fun in *that?*

Environmental Hazards



Even without overt violence, the world is a dangerous place. From fire to flood to the various toxins people ingest for fun, profit, or revenge, mortality remains an inescapable element of the human condition. Even among the Awakened, most suffering and death comes not from violence but from the world around us. So when your characters ride the whirlwind or walk on fire, a handful of systems can tell you if and how they survive.

The by-the-numbers game effects of environmental hazards can be found on the ***Environmental Hazards*** charts, starting on (p. 454). The general rules appear below.

Harsh Weather and Environments

Modern-era man is spoiled. Our houses and vehicles keep out the worst effects of extreme weather. But in an age of global climate change, not even those luxuries can save us. You can't air-condition a farm, or scale a holy mountain in a Prius. Especially for mages from the streets, deserts, and wilderness of our world, the effects of heat and cold can be vital story elements.

In all but the most extreme conditions, harsh weather comes through in narration and difficulty or dice-pool penalties (between one and three factors) based upon conditions like icy roads, driving rain, high winds, staggering humidity, and so on – see ***Rough Weather or Terrain*** under ***Combat Tactics and Circumstances***, (p. 417). Dice-pool reductions reflect the state of a character who's weakened by heatstroke or shivering, whereas increased difficulties represent environmental challenges – fog, frost, sand, jungle, and so forth. Random hazards like ice patches, sinkholes, or lightning bolts are certainly appropriate too.

Truly dangerous conditions (parched deserts, temperatures above 120 degrees or below freezing, hurricane-force winds, ice storms, and so forth) may inflict bashing damage on characters who remain outside in them. At various intervals – once per hour, twice an hour, possibly even three or four times an hour in truly extreme situations – a character suffers one health level in bashing damage unless she makes a Stamina roll to resist those effects. (See the ***Resisting*** feat on the Physical spectrum of the ***Dramatic Feats chart***.) She cannot soak it otherwise, though – that's what the Stamina roll is doing. As with other bashing attacks, this damage can kill a character if she's injured badly enough. Environmental protection gear can add to the Stamina roll (generally between one and three dice), but bulky, exhausting, or otherwise unsuitable gear (like wearing armor in a desert or being naked in a blizzard) may inflict penalties on the roll unless the character has already acclimated to those conditions. Life 2 magick can protect against those effects (assuming that an appropriate spell has been cast, of course), as can the ***Esoterica*** specialty ***Body Control*** (see that sidebar, Chapter Six, p. 285) or a character whose background history includes being conditioned to those elements, as an Inuit would be to cold conditions. Even then, however, certain extremes – like being nude in Antarctica or wrapped in furs for a trip through Death Valley – may override some or all of that protection at the Storyteller's option.

Deadly situations – like hard vacuum or deep-sea pressure – inflict lethal damage instead. A successful Life 3 Effect would protect against such environments, but the other methods won't. Such damage usually involves quarter-hour intervals, although some hazards – thick smoke, boiling liquid, toxic gases, crushing pressure – can kill in minutes or even seconds. Intense radiation inflicts aggravated damage and can kill in seconds, minutes, hours, or days, depending on the nature of the radiation and the intensity of its effects.

In suitable surroundings, a character may be able to avoid some or most of those effects by constructing shelter, gear, or both. A successful Survival (or Urban Survival, for city environments) roll – perhaps backed up by some related magick – can help her manufacture such protection, so long as she's got something to work with. Making a cold-weather shelter in the Canadian wilderness would be fairly easy if you knew what you were doing. Radiation shielding in a nuked city, though? Not quite so easy...

Starvation and Thirst

Mages don't go hungry, do they? That depends on who they are, where they are, and what sorts of magick they perform. After all, storm arts won't teach you a damned thing about conjuring food or drinks! Sure, it's easy to find chow if you're a financially solvent city-dweller; take away ready cash or easy access to food merchants, though, and that's a totally different story. People die of hunger even in American suburbs, and though your mage might not have to worry about that fate himself, a willworker who's concerned about the world at large has to take hunger into account... *other people's* hunger, if not his own.

Thirst is a far more serious issue. The industrialized world has plenty of drinkable water, but once you leave the urbanized sphere, that easy access disappears. Rural water may be contaminated by rust, pollution, sewage, or animal waste; drinking from a stream in the wilderness can infect your intestines with parasites or toxins unless you've filtered that water beforehand. Many so-called developing nations have limited access to safe drinking water; in some regions, water is either "privatized" (that is, if you can't afford to buy it, you can't have any), contaminated, or essentially nonexistent. Together, starvation and thirst kill more people most years than wars and other violence combined.

Both starvation and thirst inflict damage on characters who go long periods without nourishment. Figure that a character suffers one health level of bashing damage for each day he goes without food, and one health level of lethal damage for each day

he goes without water or other potable fluid. A successful Stamina roll can put off these effects for one day, but the difficulty of that roll starts at 6 and then goes up one level per day without nourishment. A character can go a maximum of one day without water for each dot in Stamina he possesses, and a maximum of three days without food for each dot before starting to take damage automatically. A starving character can spend Willpower points in order to put off this effect (one point per day), but he cannot do the same thing to avoid thirst. In neither case can the character soak that damage – his body is *already* soaking it simply by surviving through it. The Storyteller may reduce that character's dice pools (other than Stamina and Arete) by one for each day suffering thirst and each two days suffering hunger.

For the effects of consuming tainted water or food, see ***Drugs, Poisons, and Disease***, (pp. 441-442).

Fire

The most fearsome form of death (especially for mages), fire fries skin, devours tissue, cooks organs, cracks bones, and consumes the body's essential water supply. Burns kill not only from shock trauma and tissue damage but from dehydration as well... and burns can kill long after the fire itself has passed. It's no wonder that all living things... and many undead ones too... fear fire – and that so many hells are said to be filled with eternal flames.

In game terms, this awful element inflicts aggravated damage, from one to three health levels of it per turn. A successful Stamina roll, made against the difficulty on the ***Fire Damage chart*** (p. 454), indicates a minor burn but no damage that turn; failure means damage, obviously; and a botch reflects a major injury – blinded eye, flash-seared hand, scorched windpipe, and so forth. Every turn spent in the fire demands another roll. Life 3 magick can protect against open flames, but Life 2 and Body Control cannot.

Beyond the harm caused by the flames themselves, fire creates intense heat, consumes oxygen, releases superheated gases, and draws the body's water to the surface (as blisters) and then evaporates that moisture. Fire also ignites flammable materials and can melt many artificial substances, sometimes from the heat alone. A character may be protected from the flame but not from that heat and its effects. A character who's got flame-resistant armor or clothing suffers half damage from the fire, but he still feels the fire's side effects, like inhaling superheated gases, and or blistered flesh that's not covered by the fabric, unless he's protected against that factor too. Meanwhile, someone in heat-*conducting* protection (like metal armor) takes the same amount of damage as an unarmored character, but from radiant heat and side-effects rather than directly from the fire.

Metaphysically, fire turns material Patterns into Quintessential chaos. Prime 3 magick can channel Quintessence from a large fire **(as per the *Base Damage* or *Duration* chart in Chapter Ten, p. 504)**, but the disruptive nature of Lucifer's favorite element taxes the skills of every mage. Even Masters of the Forces Sphere respect the power of raw flame.

Explosions

Flames and explosions go together like wizards and books. And between fireballs, plasma cannons, and the more mundane sources like bombs and gas leaks, the combination of compressed space and irresistible force has serious consequences for anyone nearby.

Metaphysically, explosions blast Patterns into pieces through application of intense energy. For survival's sake, however, explosions tend to inflict bashing or lethal damage, though fiery (napalm) or catastrophic (nukes) ones inflict aggravated damage instead.

In real life (as opposed to the movies), explosions usually cause more damage from the concussive force of the blast than from the pyrotechnics involved. Bystanders can suffer burst eardrums, broken bones, and ruptured organs even when their skins remain unburnt. Shrapnel, too, is often deadlier than the heat, with people cut to ribbons by flying debris. The level of realism, then, depends upon the Storyteller's approach. In cinematic tales, lesser characters can be wiped out by explosions that major characters walk away from with a bit of singed hair; gritty realism, however, dictates lethal harm for everyone, with little dodging allowed unless it involves ducking behind walls before the bomb goes off.

Blast Area and Blast Power

Regardless of the damage involved, explosions radiate their effects outward from the center of a detonation, to a distance called the ***Blast Area***. The Storyteller (or the player who set off the explosion) rolls a dice pool based on the ***Blast Power*** of the explosive involved – one die per point of Blast Power for each pound of the explosive involved. The difficulty of that roll is 6 for concussion blasts (grenades, plastique, bombs, etc.), and 4 for balls of fire (napalm, gas tanks, Molotov cocktails, etc.).

Each success on that roll equals one health level of damage. Everyone and everything within the Blast Area takes full damage, and everyone outside that Area takes damage based upon their distance from it. That Blast Area (and everything in it) suffers the full force of the explosion; each yard (or meter) outward from the center subtracts one success from the original roll.

Certain explosives just use a dice pool for their effects – no Blast Power involved. In this case, just roll the dice as above. The Blast Area, though, still counts when you're figuring out who takes what amount of damage. Flaming explosions may ignite fires (see above), and concussive ones might weaken surrounding structures.

Handling Explosives

Some explosions go off by accident. Others are deliberate. Especially in our age of terror, the ability to design, modify, employ, and disarm explosives can mean the difference between live Sleepers and dead Masses. The secondary Knowledge ***Demolitions*** reflects a character's grasp of explosive substances, their use, and – when possible – their disposal. Without such knowledge, explosions remain mysterious forces of chaos; with it, a character can exert a small but helpful amount of control over the process.

Rules-wise, a character with Demolitions may design, use, and possibly deactivate explosive devices. He'll understand a bit about the forces and reactions involved, and might even be able to shape and direct them with Forces or Matter Effects. In general, use Dexterity + Demolitions to build or manually defuse an explosive; Perception + Demolitions to note traps involving explosives (including booby traps on a particular device); Intelligence + Demolitions to analyze or design a bomb or to gauge what its effects would be after it goes off; and Wits + Demolitions for those last-second situations when quick thinking saves the day.

Successful rolls, of course, are essential when you're playing with this sort of thing. Designing or defusing an explosive device may demand an extended roll... and by all that's holy, don't botch that roll! Meanwhile, a mage with Demolitions may enhance or suppress the effects of an explosive situation by using a Demolitions roll to lower the difficulty of a Forces-based explosive device, using an Arete roll to lower the difficulty for a Demolitions-based roll, or turning her knowledge toward magickal use by employing explosives as a focus for her Arts.

For sample explosives, see ***Explosives*** under the ***Combat System Charts,*** (p. 455).

Duck and Cover?

Characters who expect an explosion can dodge behind cover (assuming that such cover exists), go prone, or – if you use the ***Dodge the Blast*** option – save themselves in the nick of time. In this case, a successful Dexterity + Athletics (or Acrobatics) roll allows the characters to escape the worst effects. All of these choices count as a defensive action. If you've already used your action that turn, though, you're kinda screwed.

- **Cover:** A character who ducks behind a wall or other large solid object (car, counter, large heavy machine, etc.) gets the protection of that object's ***Durability*** and ***Structure***. (See *Bustin' Stuff,* p. 455.) Essentially, the explosion destroys those objects first.

  The protection absorbs one success from the explosion for each point of Durability and Structure the object has. If the protection gets destroyed and there are still successes left over, then the character behind that protection takes the remaining damage, plus another health level in lethal damage from the shrapnel of the object being destroyed. Cover works only if the object in question is fairly solid; a bicycle won't protect from you from a grenade, and a glass window would just make the effects of that blast even worse: *two* health levels of lethal damage from its shrapnel.

- **Going Prone:** Dropping to the ground can help a mage minimize an explosion's worst effects. Again, a successful Dexterity + Athletics (or Acrobatics) roll lets the character hit the dirt before things go boom. A prone character suffers two successes fewer from the blast, *assuming that the explosion is not a ball of flame*; in the latter case, a prone character still takes full damage.

- **Dodging the Blast:** Although this sort of thing's impossible in real life, action-movie heroes manage to outrun explosions, leap up and ride the blast, use kitchen appliances as space capsules, and other sorts of nonsense. Under an *optional rule* (see sidebar), mages can use magick to do similar things. Again, such stunts ignore basic physics; then again, though, so does magick.
- **Armor:** If all else fails, armor can absorb one health level's worth of lethal damage for every point of the armor's protection. The character inside the armor, however, still takes the explosion's full force in bashing damage. As all too many war vets know, Kevlar won't stop a concussive shock wave. Armor might absorb certain kinds of aggravated damage, like werewolf claws or vampire fangs; it will not, however, stop fire or radiation unless that armor has been specially made to protect against such elements or the fire involved is very small and quickly removed.

Example: *Some idiot at a Pagan ritual decides to "help" a flagging bonfire by spraying it with lighter fluid. Jinx realizes the danger right before the flames leap up the stream of lighter fluid and into the bottle in Das Idiot's hands.*

The Storyteller decides that a quart bottle of lighter fluid has a Blast Area of 10 feet. The Blast Power is only 3, for a total of three dice, but fire inflicts aggravated damage. He rolls three dice against difficulty 4 and scores two successes. Idiot-Boy takes two health levels of aggravated damage, as do the two kids standing next to him. Folks standing within 13 feet of the moron take one health level of aggravated fire damage, and the folks further out remain dazzled but unhurt.

Jinx, whose specialty is Entropy, stands within that Blast Area. She makes an instinctive dodge; her player Camille rolls five dice for Jinx's Dexterity + Awareness. Getting two successes, she manages to duck out of range quickly enough to take only one health level of damage, not two. Her biker jacket absorbs that level (it's just splashed with a little bit of burning fluid), so she rolls to extinguish the flame, yanks off her jacket, and throws it over one of the still-burning kids...

Optional Rule: Dodging the Blast

Awakened combatants excel at using Entropy, Forces, Life, Matter, and Time magick to avoid the worst effects of an explosion. Bending probability (Entropy), the elements (Forces and Matter), physical prowess (Life), or the temporal physics of a critical moment (Time), such mages manage to enact coincidences that defy expectations, if not reality.

Essentially a paranormal duck-and-cover rule, this *optional rule* allows a mage with at least two dots in the appropriate Spheres to make a Dexterity + Arete roll to metaphysically dodge the blast. (Wits can work in place of Dexterity, as this dodge is more mental than physical.) The difficulty depends upon the nature of the explosion. Success means half damage or – with five successes or more – no damage beyond cosmetic stuff like burnt clothing or minor scratches.

This sort of dodge is reflexive and doesn't require an action. In the aftermath, it seems as though the mage has found some miraculous bit of cover, dropped through the floor, rolled just right, or committed some other barely believable dodge to save his skin. Even so, this trick has limits. Large-scale explosions – like the kind that level buildings or city blocks – cannot be dodged this way.

Difficulty	Size of Explosion
6	Small detonation (grenade, Molotov cocktail)
8	Large explosion (gas tanks, small bombs, IEDs)
9/T3	Huge explosion (artillery rounds, tanker trucks, truck bombs)

T = Threshold; the number given is the minimum number of successes needed to dodge the blast

A mage with higher Sphere ratings and a full action before the blast can use other options too: vulgar magick shields (Forces, Matter, or Prime), coincidental dodges behind protection, Life-based toughness, Correspondence or Spirit magick gateways that take the mage out of harm's way before the bomb goes off, that sort of thing. Only the Mind Sphere remains useless in such explosive situations. Even so, we advise Storytellers to avoid letting players escape nuclear explosions by hiding in kitchen appliances. That's just plain silly.

Electrocution

Roughly 150 years ago, electricity was a mysterious element that only the most esoteric scientists dared to mess with; today, it fuels our everyday world. And yet, it's still dangerous as hell. Electricity is the galvanizing fire that ignites and extinguishes life. So when your characters battle near a third rail or ride the lightning in any number of ways, they risk getting badly burned.

Minor shocks from tiny self-contained battery-powered units – Tasers, TENS units, even car batteries – inflict shocks of bashing damage. Essentially unlimited sources of electricity, however – household currents, third rails, lightning bolts, Tesla coils, etc. – cause lethal damage: burnt tissue, organ trauma, disrupted body functions, and the like. Both sources cause astonishing pain and tend to lock muscles into uncontrollable spasms or rigid immobility. Our bodies run on electrical impulses, so such impulses on a larger scale do serious damage to the human animal.

The ***Electrocution chart*** shows the number of health levels per turn that a character suffers from contact with sources of electricity. The literally galvanizing effects of electrical shock also render that character more-or-less helpless – in game terms, stunned for at least one turn per health level's worth of damage taken. Pulling away from an electrical current requires a Strength

roll, difficulty 9. Prolonged contact with even a minor source of electricity (like a car battery) generates intense pain and can disrupt vital bodily functions... most especially the heart, nerves, muscles, and brain.

Oh yeah – and electricity travels, too. Anything in contract with a character or surface that conducts electricity will get shocked and damaged as well.

Characters reduced to Incapacitated by electrical injuries may suffer permanent damage: nerve trauma, impaired motor functions, brain damage, and so on. Game-wise, this might take the form of reduced Physical and/ or Mental Traits, disfiguring scars or uncontrollable tics (reductions in Appearance), and other story-based effects. There's a reason we equate paralyzing trauma with the effects of electricity. Lightning might do our bidding these days, but – like fire – it's not wise to consider it tamed.

Falls and Impact

Gravity is a harsh mistress. A character who falls between 10 and 100 feet takes one die of bashing damage for every 10 feet – rounded down – that he falls. Over that 100-foot mark, the damage becomes lethal damage instead, thanks to the wonders of terminal velocity and physics, unless that character happens to land on something that'll cushion such falls.

Realistically speaking, tree branches and rushing water won't cushion long descents. A person falling off a cliff is more likely to be impaled on branches or shattered on waves than she is to be saved by them. Decades of movies and adventure fiction, however, allow mages to use such surfaces as coincidental cushions without going outside the bounds of consensual reality. Technically, lethal damage *should* kick in after only 30 feet. The World of Darkness rules, however, say 100 feet, so what's a little physics between friends?

A long-distance fall inflicts a maximum of 10 dice, lethal; it *is* possible, then, to survive such falls, though it's not bloody likely. If the gravitationally challenged individual happens to land on something sharp or broken (rubble, rocks, racks of polearms, etc.), then *all* of the damage is aggravated. Armor absorbs only half of its usual rating (rounded down) in falling damage, unless it has been specially designed to cushion impact.

Ramming and Slamming

Ramming into, or being rammed by, other characters or solid objects (walls, tables, vehicles, etc.) may – at the Storyteller's discretion – inflict one die of bashing damage for every 10 feet (or three yards) of velocity at the time of impact. A dude who runs 20 feet before slamming into a wall, for instance, might take two dice of bashing damage from the impact.

If that object's Durability Trait is higher than the character's Stamina Trait, he may take an extra automatic bashing health level from the impact. A car that had traveled 40 feet within the previous turn, for example, would inflict four dice of bashing damage for its velocity, plus one health level of automatic impact damage to whatever it hits because... well, it's a *car*. If that impact exceeds both the object's Durability and its Structure, however, then that object could be destroyed, at the Storyteller's option.

Objects or characters that smash into each other at roughly equal velocity take the total of both impact dice pools, *plus one additional automatic success* for each turn they were traveling before they hit, to reflect the cubed effects of colliding velocity and mass.

A flying object loses one die of effect after the first 20 feet unless it's self-propelled or aerodynamic, two dice after 30 feet, and three after 50 feet. A thrown table, for example, loses momentum thanks to its mass; a motor-powered car, however, does not.

Armor, because it's designed to protect against impact, reduces ramming and slamming impact by the usual amounts. These impact rules *do not affect weapons*, as impact damage is already figured into the weapon's normal effects.

Optional Rule: Bustin' Stuff

From breaking down doors to dropping chandeliers on people's heads with Entropy magick, mages can be rather destructive. Generally, the ins and outs of breaking things should be left to narration and good die rolls ("*Five successes? That wall is history!*") For those times, however, when you need to figure out the relative toughness of an object or surface – and perhaps the fate of the person on the other side of it – the Storyteller may use the following *optional rules* about Durability and Structure.

Durability

The *Durability* of an inanimate object or surface represents the amount of damage it can absorb. Assume that an object can stop damage up to its Durability rating – one health level per point of Durability. A Durability 4 wall, for instance, could absorb four levels' worth of damage before an attack breaks through. If someone's standing on the other side of that wall when an explosion goes off, then take four health levels off of the damage she might have suffered from the blast.

Based on a combination of thickness, flexibility, and tensile strength, Durability reflects only the innate properties of inert materials, not vampires, robots, elementals, or the like. Think of it as a material's permanent soak roll. Both bashing and lethal damage affect Durability the same way, though *certain* forms of aggravated damage (mystic fire, werewolf claws, etc.) may halve an object or surface's Durability rating. No, vampires should not be able to bite through walls even though their fangs inflict aggravated damage; the idea of Dracula chewing through a bank vault door is kinda silly, though his *claws* may be another matter...

Structure

An overall reflection of an object's or surface's internal integrity, *Structure* represents the amount of damage a thing can take before it stops working. Complex items might be durable on the surface (like a laptop computer) but break easily once you disrupt their innards. Simple items have a higher Structure, even if their Durability rating is low; you might be able to crack a door with a good shove, but smashing it down entirely is more difficult.

If Durability represents an object's soak, then Structure reflects its health levels. The object in question won't necessarily be *destroyed* once its Structure gets exceeded, but it won't function in the way it's supposed to function. A car stops running; a

computer goes dead; a wall gets a nice big hole knocked through its surface even if most of the wall still stands.

Structure damage cannot be healed. Someone needs to fix it, either with normal repair work or with Matter Sphere magick. As a general rule, assume that an object that takes more than twice its Structure rating is essentially destroyed – perhaps not vaporized, but beyond repair.

Magick Versus Objects

Certain types of magick are pretty hard on material objects. Damage-inflicting Effects from the Entropy, Matter, and Prime Spheres undermine the Durability Trait – Entropy by exploiting weak spots, Matter by disrupting the substance, and Prime by disintegrating its Pattern on a Quintessential level. In all three cases, figure that a damage-based Effect from any of those Spheres reduces an object's Durability by -2. At the Storyteller's option, the Life Sphere may cause the same effect on wood, plants, and other living, organic materials.

If, using this option, the mage wants to transmute an object, she'll have to score at least one success for each point of Durability in that object; if she falls short, then she'll need to use an extended roll in order to overcome that object's Durability. This explains why turning safes into cotton candy is not exactly an easy proposition, even if you use vulgar magick. And yet, Entropy, Matter, Prime, and perhaps Life still subtract -2 from the target's Durability for each success rolled, and so you *can* turn a safe into cotton candy... it's just not particularly easy and certainly not a coincidence.

Inspired by the Objects rules in the New World of Darkness series, this option has been adjusted and simplified for **Mage 20**. So when a cyborg punches through a wall or a street prophet makes a cop car accidentally blow a tire, these rules can help you decide the amount of force it takes to succeed.

For sample objects, see that entry on the ***Combat System Charts***. The ***Vehicle Systems*** section has Durability and Structure ratings for various riding machines.

Example: *Secret Agent John Courage plans a nasty surprise for the pack of flesh-munching Reality Deviants upstairs. Noting the slender pillar that's holding up the timbers of their makeshift squat (Durability 6, Structure 6), he scans the framework with his Stability Integrity Matrix (an Entropy 1 Effect built into his mirrorshades), spots the weak spot in that support, and lets fly with a massive kick at that location – a coincidental Forces 2/ Matter 2 Effect that fractures the pillar's integrity, focused through a martial arts kick.*

Brian, the player, picks up his dice and rolls for the weak-spot scan. He gets four successes on the scan, which gives Brian a -3 reduction to the difficulty of that kick. Using "violence as a focus" ***(as described on p. 413)****, he rolls John Courage's Enlightenment of 7. This gives Brian seven dice to roll. After the successful Entropy scan, his difficulty is 3.* ***(Sphere 2 + 3 for coincidence, -3 for the scan. Magickal Effects have a MINIMUM difficulty of 3, however – see p. 535).*** *Brian rolls six successes.*

If he were trying to hit a moving target, Brian would need to roll Dexterity + Martial Arts in order to score a successful kick. Since the pillar isn't going anywhere, the Storyteller gives the shot to Brian for free.

Structure

Durability	Substance is...
1	Fragile (normal glass, thin wood, or ceramic)
2	Breakable (sturdy glass, plywood, crockery)
3	Tough yet flexible (interior door, safety glass, drywall, thin metal)
4	Strong and rigid
5	Strong and flexible
6	Solid
7	Solid and thick
8	Solid, thick, and reinforced
9	Thick, solid, and dense
10	Exceedingly strong and dense
11+	Damn near impenetrable

Structure	Object is...
1	Fragile (wineglass, light bulb)
2-3	Easily broken (window, laptop, drywall)
4-5	Sturdy and complex (car engine, camera, printer)
6-7	Sturdy and simple (table, plank, tire, thick door, brick wall)
8-9	Thick and simple (stone wall, streetlight pole, metal bulkhead)
10	Thick and reinforced (safe, bank vault, building foundation)
11+	Built to take enormous punishment (airliner, ship, military vehicle)

Based on six successes scored on the Enlightenment roll, plus one automatic success for using the Forces Sphere, the kick itself inflicts 14 health levels of damage on the pillar. Use of the Matter Sphere reduces the pillar's Durability to 4, so that kick deals out ten health levels against the pillar's Structure of 6.

Pillar? WHAT pillar? You mean that splintered ruin that USED to be a pillar?

The pillar breaks, the floorboards creak, and Secret Agent John Courage prepares a fitting reception for his impending guests...

Drowning and Suffocation

Even Awakened beings need to breathe. But when smoke or water force a character to hold her breath, that character can hold her breath for a length of time based on her Stamina Trait:

Stamina	Holding Breath
1	30 seconds
2	One minute
3	Two minutes
4	Four minutes
5	Eight minutes
6	15 minutes
7	20 minutes
8	30 minutes
9	45 minutes
10	One hour

That character can extend her breath-holding time by spending temporary Willpower; each point spent grants another 30 seconds of time. If the character cannot reach breathable air by the end of that time, she starts to suffocate or drown at the rate of one health level per turn. If she reaches Incapacitated and still cannot breathe, she dies one turn afterward.

Suffocation damage is automatic; it is not rolled and cannot be soaked. Oxygen deprivation accumulates and heals like bashing damage, although drowning damage (which involves inhalation of water, and can damage the lungs and windpipe) may accumulate and heal like lethal damage instead, at the Storyteller's discretion.

If a character with First Aid training (Medicine 1 or higher, assuming modern medical techniques) can reach a drowned or suffocated character within fewer than 10 minutes of death, he can try to resuscitate her with a successful Wits + Medicine roll. In unusually cold water, this time extends up to half an hour. The difficulty starts at 6 and goes up by +1 for each five minutes after the first, however, and starts racking up thresholds of successes needed once it reaches difficulty 9. Successful Life 3 magick can restore a person to life within those first few minutes. However, after 10 minutes (30 minutes in cold water) without air, the brain begins to deteriorate. After that point, only Life 5 will do.

Assuming that the character has had time to meditate herself into a trance state, a successful use of the ***Body Control*** specialty can extend breath-holding time by the amounts shown in the sidebar dealing with that Trait. After that, the devotee begins suffocating or drowning like any other person would do. It's worth nothing that drowning is one of the biggest accidental killers on Earth, especially among children... and, contrary to popular impressions, is not marked by thrashing and yelling, but by silence.

Drugs, Poisons, and Disease

Each living being is a chemistry set. The sublime features of life come about through complex chemical processes. Certain other processes – often referred to as drugs, poisons, and diseases, among other names – change the chemical default settings in a given living thing. Some hurt, some help, and some have both effects. For simplicity's sake, think of *drugs* as chemical compounds intended to alter a person's body and mind, *poisons* as chemicals intended to harm a living thing, and *disease* as an internal alteration that causes suffering. Mages have long histories with all three.

Despite its negative connotations, a drug is simply a substance; medicines are drugs, and drugs are medicines. *Psychotropic* drugs represent a certain kind of medicine meant to enhance various mental and physical states. Mystics and technomancers alike use psychotropic compounds as tools for transcendence, relaxation, heightened awareness, and physical vigor. As the ***Drugs and Poisons*** entry in the ***Instruments*** section of **Chapter Ten** explains, various practices use drugs to focus their intentions. Even so, psychotropics alter body chemistry... and in that sense, they become *intoxicants*, working their effects through potentially hazardous chemical changes.

Poisons are intentionally harmful drugs and diseases – venoms, toxins, infections, and so forth, with unpleasant effects upon a body and mind. Some are natural and many others are not. Thanks to the long associations between poison and the Awakened, most Sleepers consider magic to be a sort of metaphysical or even literal toxin. The word "witch" in the infamous Exodus 22:18 passage, "*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,*" is rooted in a Hebrew word sometimes translated as "poisoner." As for disease, mages of all types have been regarded throughout history as both healers and carriers of sickness. Drugs, poisons, and disease, then, can be tools of magick; subjects of magickal activity; and things that mages suffer from, cause, and cure.

Calling Dr. Feelgood

Given that long association, it's not surprising that certain mages specialize in drugs and poisons. The secondary Knowledge ***Pharmacopeia/Poisons*** reflects a character's dedication to such

substances, from the perspective of either high-tech research or time-tested, traditional practices. With that Trait, your character can analyze, concoct, enhance, dilute, or diagnose the effects of various substances. As with the ***Demolitions*** knowledge (referenced above), a properly skilled mage might make certain toxins and psychotropics more or less effective with magick; use Life, Mind, or Matter magick to help create unusually potent substances; and employ poisons, medicine, and drugs as instruments of focus... probably while also enhancing their effects – a common gambit for Progenitors, Verbena, Dreamspeakers, Bata'a, Children of Knowledge, and Cultists of Ecstasy.

By the same token, a knowledgeable character can also recognize the effects of certain substances (Perception + Pharmacopeia); talk intoxicated people down during a bad experience (Manipulation + Pharmacopeia); spot the nasty potential of an apparently harmless substance (Wits + Pharmacopeia); and potentially use Life or Mind Arts to counteract a given toxin, because he understands the way it works (Intelligence + Pharmacopeia). So yes – mages have deep relationships with chemical alterations... and some understand those relationships better than others do.

Toxin Ratings

In game terms, poisons, diseases, and dangerous drugs all inflict damage, alter Traits, and can be caused or cured with Life Sphere Effects. Mages who specialize in such things – especially Ecstatics, Thanatoics, shamans, alchemists, witches, and Progenitors – tend to favor that Sphere, and they can focus Life, Mind, and other Spheres through diseases and chemical compounds.

All diseases, drugs, and toxins have the following Traits:

- **Toxin Rating:** The number of health levels that a particular toxin or disease inflicts upon the afflicted character. Entries marked with a (B) inflict bashing damage, and those marked with an (L) deal out lethal damage. Drugs and poisons cause this damage one or two times per ingestion unless the player makes a Stamina roll (below), whereas long-lasting diseases inflict that damage once per week or perhaps – as in the case of slow killers like cancer – once per month or longer.
- **Difficulty:** The difficulty of the character's Stamina roll to resist the damaging effects. If the disease or poison continues to affect the character, or if that character keeps taking the drug, make new rolls as necessary. On a botched drug roll, the character overdoses which – as the warning goes – "may be harmful or fatal."

Certain diseases or substances have both a (B) and an (L); these designations reflect the severity of the disease or the purity of the substance. Lethal compounds or diseases tend to affect a victim until either he's cured or he dies.

Especially vile paranormal toxins deal out aggravated damage, but fortunately such substances are rare. Powerful Night-Folk often shrug off toxins and disease (or, like vampires, remain immune to most of them), but typically one or two substances – like silver to werecreatures or iron to the fae-folk – inflict aggravated damage against them.

Medicine and Magick

Given time and the tools of her trade, a character with the Medicine Trait can ease the symptoms of a disease or substance. The toxin still needs to work its way out of the body, though, so although a successful Intelligence + Medicine roll can help the patient feel better – and perhaps speed the healing process as per the healing rules detailed under ***Health and Injury*** – they can't actually *heal* the problem, merely treat its effects.

Life magick, on the other hand, can *cure* such problems. Game-wise, this usually involves successful Life 2 Effects to alter the mage himself, and Life 3 Effects to alter someone else. Slow cures tend to be coincidental, especially when focused through a commonly accepted tool or practice. ("*Here – take this. It'll help you feel better in no time.*") Instant cures, however, tend to be vulgar unless the patient and observers literally *do* believe in miracles ("*Be HEALED!*").

The same runs true for inflicting intoxication and disease. Although a person can have a literally intoxicating effect on other folks... a specialty of Ecstatics, Nephandi, and Syndicate ops – that effect still needs to be fairly subtle. A person who gets falling-down drunk after shaking hands with a stranger will

Toxins

Toxin Rating	Difficulty	Disease	Poison or Drug
One	6	Cold (B)	Alcohol (B), THC (B)
Two	7	Chicken Pox (B), Food Poisoning (B), MRSA (L)	Methamphetamine (B), Methanol (L)
Three	7	Influenza (B), Cancer, Early (L), Pneumonia (L)	Ptomaine (B), Tainted Water (B), Tear Gas (cloud; B), Belladonna (L)
Four	8	HIV (L), Leprosy (L), Cancer, Advanced (L)	Salmonella (B), Ammonia (L), Fouled Water (B)
Five	8	Severe Flu (B/L), Cholera (B), Cancer, Extensive (L)	Bleach (L), Industrial Waste (L)
Six	9	Bubonic Plague (L), Anthrax (L)	Strong Acids (L)
Seven	9/T3	Ebola (L)	Sarin (L), Cyanide (L), Acidic Sludge (L)

Notes: Clouds of toxins cannot be dodged; to avoid the effects, a character needs protective gear or Life 2 magick. Many toxic chemicals work on skin contact, and cannot be avoided by holding one's breath.

wonder what the fuck just happened. And though curses and poisons have deep connections to witchcraft and Voudoun, a mage who points her finger at someone and gives him instant leprosy is working vulgar magick for sure.

Better Living Through Chemistry

You don't have to be a Cultist of Ecstasy or Child of Knowledge in order to deal with psychotropic substances. Shamans of all types work with mind-altering compounds, whereas technomancers deal with smart and designer drugs as well as with more mundane drugs like coke or booze. Sure, plenty of mages *do* just say no. For those who don't, however, the following drugs have notable in-game effects:

- **Alcohol:** Every two drinks of a moderate alcoholic beverage cause one die of bashing damage. Really potent drinks have the same effect after a single drink. The resulting dice-pool penalties reflect blurry perceptions and staggered reflexes. Heavy-duty drinking damage can linger for a day or more in the shape of hangovers, nausea, and other impairments. If the character drinks herself to Incapacitated, she passes out... and, if she's a supporting character, she might even die.

  Whether or not the character takes damage, a drinking character needs to make a Stamina roll for every two drinks she consumes. The difficulty depends upon the potency of the drink – 5 or 6 for wine coolers or weak beer, 8 or 9 for the really hard stuff. Failure on that roll subtracts one die from Perception- and Dexterity-based dice pools. A botch knocks the character out right then and there. Yes, heavy drinking can indeed fuck you up!

- **Cannabinoids (Pot, Hashish):** The mellowing effects of ganja alter a character's sense of time, space, and wellbeing. On the flip side, they can induce paranoia and heart-thumping panic attacks. Game-wise, a character either gains or loses one die from his Perception-based dice pools while under the influence of the herb. The player makes a Willpower roll; success indicates a bonus, but failure indicates a loss. Continued smoking may lead to further rolls and more intense effects. At the Storyteller's discretion, a character under the influence of pot or hash could even lose one die from his Dexterity- and Willpower-based dice pools for each half hour spent indulging.

  Despite occasional perceptions to the contrary, cannabis inflicts no physical damage. Its influence might, at the Storyteller's option, reduce the difficulties of Time-based spells by -1, thanks to the slipstream effect it has on time perceptions. This bonus does not increase with continued use of awakened herbs, however, and should not be a reliable bonus in any case – sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

- **Cocaine/Crack/Meth/Speed:** High-octane stimulants give a character one extra action per turn while she's under the influence, but they also reduce her Willpower-based dice pools by one die for rolls based on judgment, restraint, or common sense. Each dose inflicts two automatic health levels in bashing damage once the drug wears off and the character crashes. She might put off this effect by using the drug again, but the crash gets two levels worse each time: four health levels for two consecutive uses, six after three uses, and so forth. A dose of coke lasts about an hour, crack lasts roughly half that long, and crank lasts between four to six hours per dose.

  Each time a character consumes a heavy stimulant, the Storyteller may require a Stamina roll, difficulty 6. Failure means irrational behavior (recklessness, flash temper, violent mood swings, etc.), and a botch means an overdose. In the latter case, the character takes double the usual damage... lethal, not bashing. Prolonged use,

Awakening Substances

According to many shamanic practices, all material things have essential spirits within them. By awakening those spirits, a shaman can ease or intensify the effects of those material things. On a technological level, science can ease or intensify the effects of a compound or disease by altering its molecular structure. In game terms, both approaches awaken a drug or disease, making them more or less powerful than they would normally be.

In the story, a character employs his favored focus to enhance the properties of the drug or illness in question. Shamans tend to employ trance states, rituals, and invocations to the spirit of the drug or disease. Scientists employ microscopes and other lab gear, analysis procedures, computer simulations, and live-subject tests in order to verify results. Witches and ecstasy-seekers employ fusions of the previous approaches, measuring compounds and working with formulas in order to get the desired result, but handling that task with respect and reverence for the supernatural element as well. Your character should use whichever approach seems most appropriate to her beliefs and practices.

Rules-wise, you can use Spirit 3 to rouse the spirit of a drug, or Life 3/ Spirit 3 to rouse the spirit of a disease in someone else's body. A scientist can use Matter 2 to enhance the properties of a substance, Life 2 to enhance microbes, Life 3/ Matter 2 in order to enhance the effects of substances within a living body, and Life 3 to enhance the effect of microbe-based disease. Combined with the rituals described above, all of those approaches seem coincidental and add one level to a substance's effects (its Toxin Rating and possibly its other effects as well) for each success on the Arete roll.

Awakening the spirit inside a substance can also create mystic drugs, and enhancing the properties of microbes and compounds allows a mage to craft technomagickal drugs and diseases. For an example of psychoactive totem spirits, check out Mary Jane in the ***Totem Spirits*** section of **Appendix I, (p.635).**

in any case, tends to lead to addiction, irrationality, and other ugly side effects.

- **Designer Drugs:** Concocted by either Awakened or Sleeper chemists, designer drugs alter bodies and minds in various interesting ways. The most famous concoctions, LSD and Ecstasy, have been around for generations and aren't usually considered designer goods any more, even though that's technically what they are.

  In game terms, a designer drug can have whatever effects the Storyteller wants it to have – typically a temporary boost of Mental and/ or Physical Traits, at the cost of unfortunate behavior and potentially serious side effects. Such concoctions make excellent plot hooks and mystic/ technomagickal focuses ("*...you take the blue pill, and...*").

- **Ecstasy/ Mood-Altering Drugs:** Technically, *all* psychoactive drugs have mood-altering effects. However, this category – epitomized by MDMA, a.k.a. Ecstasy, or X – reworks brain chemistry in an effort to promote trust and wellbeing. Game-wise, these substances may add bonus dice to Willpower-based dice pools at the expense of a level or two of automatic bashing damage when the user comes down. Ecstasy, in particular, has tooth-grinding, dehydrating side effects; a botched Stamina roll while "rolling" on X may cause a seizure that inflicts one to three health levels of immediate lethal damage instead of that post-roll bashing damage.

  On the good side, ecstasy promotes intense (often compulsive) sensory awareness and may add a die or two to Perception-based dice pools for about an hour during the highest point of the Ecstasy roll. Depending on the dose and purity, an MDMA roll may last between two to five hours.

- **Psychedelics (LSD, DMT, peyote, etc.):** Mind-bending substances provide the keys to many mystic practices; some folks have even theorized that human consciousness itself arose when primates ate psychotropic fungi. Truth is an especially hazy concept where psychedelics are concerned. Certain folks prefer the term *entheogen* over the more common *hallucinogen*, because hallucinations project dreams and delusions, whereas entheogens wake the "inner god."

  Rules-wise, a dose of psychedelic drugs reduces a character's dice pools by one to three dice for the duration of the trip. A mild trip bends the landscape, and a major trip skews every reflex and perception. At the Storyteller's option, a character who's using such drugs in a focus may reduce the difficulties of her Correspondence, Mind, Spirit, and Time-based magick rolls.

  Although such drugs inflict no physical damage, many entheogens induce nausea, dry mouth, dehydration, and profound – sometimes painful – perceptual intensity. Typical trips last between four and 12 hours, peaking between one and three hours after the first dose. Contrary to popular belief, trips don't jumpstart weird shit as soon as the user drops the dose. Most often, the perceptions begin skewing within a half hour, gradually rising toward more intense sensations.

  Somewhere along the trip, the Storyteller might request a Willpower roll, with difficulties based on the stuff that's going on in the character's life at the time. Happy circumstances lower the difficulty, but fears and challenges raise them. A successful Willpower roll means a generally good – perhaps profound – experience, whereas a failed roll drops the user into a bad (perhaps shattering) excursion through Nightmare Alley. Either trip can inspire a Seeking, and a really bad one might cause a Quiet. (See **Chapters Seven** and **Ten** for details.) Thankfully, an experienced guide can help ease a bad trip or enhance a good one. Successful social rolls from a character who's familiar with psychotropic experiences (like many shamans, certain alchemists and doctors, various witches, and almost all Ecstatic devotees) allow a tripping character to make new Willpower rolls in order to master her experience and perhaps gain long-term benefits from even the bad trips.

- **Opiates (Heroin, Morphine, Opium, etc.) and Sedatives (Valium, Quaaludes, etc.):** Suppressing the sensory and nervous systems, the various downer drugs reduce pain and promote euphoria. Although opium has a mystic history of visionary trance states, the addictive properties of such substances make them risky and problematic tools.

  In game terms, a dose of opiates or downers reduces pain-based dice penalties, typically by one or two health levels' worth of damage. That damage isn't actually *healed*, but the associated penalties don't hinder the character so long as the drug remains in effect. Meanwhile, the character's Dexterity- and Social-Trait dice pools drop by one die per dose. Each dose also inflicts one automatic level of bashing damage, not from injury *per se*, but from the deadened energy associated with such drugs.

  At the Storyteller's option, an opium or heroin trance might decrease the difficulty of vision-based Mind or Spirit spellcasting rolls. A character who's concentrating on a particular problem could receive a one or two-die bonus to his Intelligence or Perception rolls... after all, Sherlock Holmes was an opium user who believed that the drug sharpened his mental faculties. On the downside, opiates and sedatives are ferociously addictive. Regular users should certainly have a Flaw or two associated with the drug. Also, each new dose of an opiate or strong sedative that has not been meticulously measured *by someone who's not under the influence* – or that has been mystically awakened or enhanced – demands a Stamina roll. Failure means a deadening trance, and a botch means potential coma or death.

Combat System Charts

*For specific wizard duel systems, see the **Magickal Duels** section.*

Order of Battle

- **Initiative:** Initiative Rating (Dexterity + Wits) + one die.
- **Attack:** See whether or not attacks hit their targets.
- **Defense:** See whether or not a defender has avoided an attack.
- **Damage:** Determine how badly the combatants get hurt.

Attack

- **Projectile Guns:** Dexterity + Firearms.
- **Hypertech Force Guns:** Dexterity + Energy Weapons.
- **Thrown Weapons:** Dexterity + Athletics.
- **Hand-Held Weapons:** Dexterity + Melee.
- **Bare-Hand Attacks:** Dexterity + Brawl, Martial Arts, Athletics, or Do.
- **Magickal Attacks:** Arete. If attack involves a strike or weapon, roll appropriate Trait as above.

Defense

- **Dodge:** Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 6. Each success removes one attacker success.
- **Block:** Dexterity + Brawl or Martial Arts, difficulty variable.
- **Parry:** Dexterity + Melee or Martial Arts, difficulty variable.
- **Desperate Defense:** Dexterity + Athletics, -1 die per attacker after first.
- **Countermagick:** Arete, difficulty 8, as a dodge; see **Chapter Ten**.

Damage

- **Damage:** As attack type, difficulty 6; dice pool is attacker's damage roll + numbers of successes after the first.
- **Soaking:** Stamina roll, difficulty 6; each success removes one damage success.
- **Bashing:** All characters can soak.
- **Lethal:** Humans cannot soak without armor, except under ***Cinematic Damage*** option.
- **Aggravated:** No soak without special protection.

Magick and Violence

- **Violence as Focus:** One action, two rolls: Arete/ Enlightenment, to see if magick succeeds; and attack roll (as above) to see if attack succeeds. *If violence is focus and character cannot perform one without the other*, then player does not need to divide dice pool as if performing multiple actions.
- **Violence Enhances Magick:** Two actions, two rolls: roll attack normally; each success lowers difficulty for subsequent Arete roll by -1 (maximum modifier -3).
- **Magick Enhances Violence:** Two actions, two rolls: Arete roll to cast Effect; each success reduces difficulty of subsequent attack by -1 for each success (maximum modifier of -3).
- **Fast-Casting:** Improvised magickal attack; +1 difficulty on Arete roll.

Spirit Combat

- **Initiative:** Spirits roll Willpower for initiative.
- **Attack:** Spirits roll Willpower, difficulty 6, unless using a Charm. (For specifics, see ***Charm*** entries.)
- **Defense:** Spirits roll Willpower, difficulty 6, to dodge; or else split Willpower dice pool between attack and dodge.
- **Damage:** Spirits roll Rage, difficulty 6; each success inflicts one health level of damage. Said damage may be lethal or aggravated, depending upon Charm. Mages with Spirit/ Dimensional Science Sphere can soak spirit damage, difficulty 6; mages without Spirit can soak with Arete, difficulty 8.
- **Soak Damage:** Spirits soak damage with their Willpower Trait. Materialized spirits attack and defend as physical characters. Most physical attacks and weapons cannot harm un-Materialized spirits, nor can Spheres other than Prime and Spirit/ Dimensional Science.

The Health Chart

Health Levels	Dice Pool Penalty	Movement Penalty
Bruised	0	Minor pain and swelling; he's banged up but otherwise fine.
Hurt	-1	Cuts, bruises, aches, perhaps bleeding, but no major impairment.
Injured	-1	Minor and painful injuries limit the character to half his normal movement.
Wounded	-2	Notable injuries handicap him; the character can't run but may still walk.
Mauled	-2	Significant internal and external damage; character can hobble around (three yards/ turn) but not move normally.
Crippled	-5	Catastrophic injuries; character can only crawl (one yard/ turn).
Incapacitated	N/A	Character's unconscious from pain and trauma; no movement possible.
Dead	N/A	Another soul greets the Great Mystery.

Healing Damage

Health Level	Recovery Time*
BASHING DAMAGE	
Bruised to Wounded	One hour
Mauled	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	12 hours
LETHAL AND AGGRAVATED DAMAGE	
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Two months
Crippled	Three months
Incapacitated	Five months

** Recovery times are cumulative.*

Targeting Locations

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage Modifier
Medium (arm, briefcase)	+1	1 die
Small (head, hand, gun)	+2	2 dice
Precise (eye, heart, kneecap)	+3	3 dice

Cover and Concealment

Cover	Difficulty to Hit Target	Shooter's Difficulty
Lying Flat	+1	0
Moving	+1	+1
Behind Wall	+2	+1
Only Head Exposed	+3	+2

Character Is...

- **Ambushed:** Attacker rolls Dexterity + Stealth (+ Arcane Background), resisted by target's Perception + Alertness, difficulty 6. Attacker gets one free action if she wins, with one additional die per success after the first one; attacker goes first in tie; target spots attacker if target wins.
- **Blinded:** Cannot block, dodge, or parry; all other tasks +2 difficulty.
- **Knocked Down:** As per *Immobilized* until standing back up.
- **Immobilized:** Attackers reduce difficulty to hit by -2 if target can move; hit automatically if target cannot move.
- **Stunned:** If, from one blow, target suffers damage that exceeds Stamina rating, then target is stunned one turn; attempts to hit are -2 difficulty during that time.
- **Fighting Multiple Opponents:** +1 difficulty per attacker, to character's attack and defense rolls, up to a maximum penalty of +4. A mage with Correspondence 1, Mind 1, or Time 2, *and who has an active sensory Effect in one of those Spheres at the time of combat* can ignore penalty.
- **In Rough Conditions:** +1 to +3 difficulties, depending on circumstances.

Armor and Shields

Armor Type	Rating	Dexterity Penalty
Tough Hide	1-3	0
Cybernetic Armor	1-4	0
Reinforced Clothing	1-2	0
Enhanced Clothing	1-5	0
Biker Jacket	1	-1
Leather Duster	2	-2
Cosplay Mail	2	-1
Chainmail	4	-2
Steel Breastplate	3	-2
Full Plate	5	-2
Kevlar Vest	3	-1
Flak Vest	4	-2
Riot Suit	4	-2
Military Armor	5	-2
Alanson Hardsuit	7	-2
SHIELDS		
Trash Can Lid	3/+1	0
Wooden Shield	2/+2	-1
Metal Shield	4/+2	-2
Riot Shield	5/+2	-1

Notes:

Tough Hide reflects animals, Bygones, constructs, or shapechanged mages with especially thick or armored skin.

Cybernetic Armor has been built into the wearer. See the Background: ***Enhancement***.

Reinforced Clothing has been stiffened, padded, or layered with thin mesh protection.

Enhanced Clothing is apparently normal clothing modified by the Matter Sphere.

Biker Jacket represents thick, practical, heavy-duty protection.

Cosplay Mail reflects modern costume armor.

Chainmail represents battle-worthy chain-link armor, heavier than cosplay mail.

Full Plate is articulated knight's armor.

Riot Suit is police heavy body armor.

Military Armor reflects a full suit of modern battle armor.

Alanson Hardsuit is a standard-issue, full-body suit of hypertech Technocratic armor, used by Union security forces composed of extraordinary citizens and Enlightened agents alike. See **Appendix II (p. 656)** for details.

Wooden and *Metal Shields* represent field-ready shields built for jousts and reenactment battles.

Riot Shield is a thick Plexiglas or metal-with-viewport shield, employed by police forces (typically in a wall formation) during civil unrest situations.

Ranged Combat Maneuvers

Maneuver	Traits	Difficulty	Damage
Aiming	Dexterity + Firearms	N/A	+2 dice to hit per turn spent aiming
Full-Auto	Dexterity + Firearms	+2	+10 dice
Point Blank	Dexterity + Firearms	4	Weapon
Strafing	Dexterity + Firearms	+2	Special
3-Round Burst	Dexterity + Firearms	+1	+3 dice to hit; damage as weapon
Thrown Weapon	Dexterity + Athletics	6	Weapon
Two Weapons	Dexterity + Firearms	+1	Special

Dirty Fighting Maneuvers (min. three dots in Brawl)

Maneuver	Traits	Difficulty	Damage
Blinding	Dexterity + Subterfuge	9	Special [#1]
Body Slam	Dexterity + Brawl	6	Strength + 2/B or L
Curbstomp	Strength + Brawl	6	Strength +2 /L
Haymaker	Dexterity + Brawl	7	Strength +2/B + Knockdown
Head Butt	Dexterity + Brawl	6	Strength +1/B
Jab Pistol	Dexterity + Brawl	6	As Firearm +2/L
Low Blow	Dexterity + Brawl	7	Strength + Stun/B or L
Pistol Whip	Dexterity + Melee	7	Strength +2/L

Notes

[#1] = Enemy blinded for one turn per success, loses two dice from his dice pools until he recovers. May cause lasting injury, depending upon attack.

General Hand-To-Hand Maneuvers

Maneuver	Traits	Difficulty	Damage
Bite	Dexterity + Brawl	5	Strength +1 to +3 /B or L
Claw	Dexterity + Brawl	6	Strength +1 to +3 /L or A
Disarm	Dexterity + Melee	+1 / 8	Special #1
Flank/ Rear Attack	Dexterity + Ability	-1 /-2	As Attack
Grapple	Strength + Brawl	6	Strength or None
Kick	Dexterity + Brawl	7	Strength +1 /B
Punch	Dexterity + Brawl	6	Strength /B
Reading Opponent	Perception + Trait	6	Special #2
Sweep	Dexterity + Brawl	8	Special #3
Tackle	Dexterity + Brawl	7	Strength + Special #4 /B

Notes

#1 = Attacker rolls Dexterity + Melee at +1 difficulty; if successes exceed opponent's Strength score, he drops weapon. If not, attacker inflicts usual damage. On botched roll, attacker loses own weapon. Bare-handed disarm is Dexterity + Brawl, difficulty 8, minus one die from usual attack pool. (See also ***Martial Arts Disarm***, below.)

#2 = Resisted roll, observer's Perception + Combat Trait against opponent's Wits + Combat Trait. Successful observer adds one die per success to the dice pool to perform next action.

#3 = Knockdown: if blow succeeds, antagonist winds up on ground.

#4 = Requires at least two yards to achieve effective momentum. Each combatant needs successful Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6 for the attacker, difficulty 6 + the attacker's successes for the target) or wind up on ground. May damage attacker.

Do Special Techniques (min. two dots in Do; four techniques max.)

Maneuver	Traits	Difficulty	Damage
Arrow Cutting	Dexterity + Do	7/9	Deflect/ Weapon
Hurricane Throw	Dexterity + Do	8	Strength +3 + successes
Iron Shirt	N/A	6	+ 1 die to soak per dot in Do
Kiaijutsu	Special	7/ N/A /8	Special #1
Plum Blossom	Dexterity + Do	6	Leaps; see entry
Soft Fist	Dexterity + Do	7	Attacker's Strength + Weapon + Successes
10,000 Weapons Dexterity + Do	N/A	1 die per dot in Do/B, Weapon/L or Weapon +1/L	
Typhoon Kick	Dexterity + Do	8	Strength +5 + Successes
Weapon Art	as per Attack	N/A	Special – see entry

Notes

Do practitioners of all levels may also perform ***General Hand-To-Hand*** and ***Martial Art***s maneuvers, choosing between bashing and lethal damage; may not perform ***Dirty Fighting*** maneuvers at all.

#1 = Practitioner may give self a three-turn Stamina bonus of one dot for every success in a Stamina + Do roll (difficulty 7); frighten enemies by rolling Manipulation + Do (difficulty is the target's Willpower +3); or hold the Shout in (Charisma + Do, difficulty 8), adding successes to Expression, Leadership, Intimidation, or performance-based Art roll.

Martial Arts Maneuvers

Maneuver	Traits	Difficulty	Damage
Counter Throw	Dexterity + Martial Arts	6	Special [#1]
Death Strike	Dexterity + Martial Arts	5	Strength +2/L
Deflecting Block	Dexterity + Martial Arts	6	Attacker's Strength/B [#2]
Disarm	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7	3
Dragon Tail Sweep	Dexterity + Martial Arts	8	Opponent's Strength /B
Elbow/ Knee Strike	Dexterity + Martial Arts	5	Strength +1/B
Flying Kick	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7	Strength +2/B
Hard/ Soft Strike	Dexterity + Martial Arts	5/6	Strength +1/B
Joint Lock	Dexterity + Martial Arts	5	Grapple + Successes/L
Nerve Strike	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7	Strength +3/B [#4]
Snake Step	Dexterity + Martial	6/5	Dodge + 3 dice
Snap Kick	Dexterity + Martial Arts	5	Strength +1/B
Spinning Kick	Dexterity + Martial Arts	6	Strength +3/B
Throw	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7/6	Strength + Movement/B [#5]
Thunder Kick	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7	Strength +3 + Successes/B
Vital Strike	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7	Strength/L
Withering Grasp	Dexterity + Martial Arts	7	Strength/B + Disarm

Notes

See also ***Minimum Ability*** and soft or hard style listings for each maneuver, under full descriptions.

#1 = Resisted roll of Dexterity + Martial Arts against attacker's Dexterity + Brawl, Melee, or Martial Arts; success deflects attack and may ***Throw***, attacker as below.

#2 = Each success subtracts one success from attacker's roll; if defender scores more successes than attacker, then attacker must roll Dexterity (difficulty 8) or take own Strength in bashing damage.

#3 = As per ***Disarm***, above, bare-handed; minimum three dots in Martial Arts Skill.

#4 = If attacker scores at least three successes against opponent, opponent must make Stamina roll (difficulty 8) or be stunned next turn.

#5 = Attacker with Dexterity + Martial Arts dice pool equal to or higher than opponent's Dexterity throws opponent up to one yard for each success scored. Extra damage possible – see entry.

Melee Weapons

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage/Type	Conceal	Notes
		Axes		
Hatchet	6	Strength +1/L	J	
Tomahawk	6	Strength +2/L	J	
Axe	7	Strength +3/L	N	
Great Axe	7	Strength +6/L	N	#1
Polearm	7	Strength +3/L	N	#2
		Blades		
Stiletto	4	Strength +1/L	P	#3
Knife	4	Strength +1/L	P	
Short Sword	5	Strength +2/L	J	
Sword	6	Strength +2/L	T	
Katana	6	Strength +3/L	T	#4
Great Sword	5	Strength +6/L	N	#1
Sai	5	Strength +1/L	J	#5, #6
Hook Sword(s)	7	Strength +3/L	T	Used as pair, #2, #5, #6
		Clubbing Weapons		
Riot Baton	5	Strength +1/B	T	
Baseball Bat	5	Strength +2/B	T	
Crowbar	6	Strength +1/L	J	
Staff	6	Strength +1/B	N	
Iron Staff	7	Strength +3/L	N	#1
Mace	6	Strength +2/L	N	
Nunchaku	7	Strength +2/B	T	#5, #7
Spiked Club	6	Strength +2/L	T	
Huge Spiked Club	7	Strength +4/L	N	#1
		Fist-Extension Weapons		
Sap	4	Strength +1/B	P	
Brass Knuckles	6	Strength/L	P	
Spiked Gauntlet	6	Strength +1/L	J	
Hand Claws (small)	6	Strength +1/L	P	
Hand Claws (large)	6	Strength +2/L	P	
Katar	6	Strength +2	J	#3, #5
War Fan	5	Strength +2/L	J	#5, #7
Wind and Fire Wheel	6	Strength +3/L	N	#6
		Improvised Weapons		
Broken Bottle	6	Strength +1/L	P	#8
Chair	7	Strength +2/B	N	
Chainsaw	8	Strength +7/L	N	#9
Table	8	Strength +3/B	N	#1

Melee Weapons (continued)

Whips and Chains [#10]

Chain	5	Strength/B	J
Chain Whip	6	Strength +1/L	J
Kusarigama	7	Strength +3 /B	T [#2, #6]
Manriki-Gusari	7	Strength +2 /L	T [#2, #6]
Flogger	6	Strength +1/B	
Barbed Cat	6	Strength/L	J
Whip	6	Strength/L	J
Bullwhip	7	Strength +1/L	J

Notes
Difficulty: The normal difficulty at which the weapons is used.
Damage: The number of damage dice rolled when employing this weapon.
Type: B = Bashing L = Lethal A = Aggravated
Conceal: P = Pocket J = Jacket T= Trenchcoat N= N/A
#1 = Two-handed weapon; very heavy – requires min. Strength 3 to employ.
#2 = Requires two hands to employ properly; +2 difficulty if used one-handed.
#3 = Penetrates up to three points of armor.
#4 = May be used two-handed for an additional +1 damage die.
#5 = +1 to dice pool when used to block.
#6 = +2 to dice pool for disarm attempts.
#7 = +1 difficulty to opponent's block attempts.
#8 = Breaks after three uses.
#9 = On a botch, user inflicts damage upon self.
#10 = May be used to entangle an enemy's limb at +1 difficulty.

Ranged Weapons

Type	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal	Notes
Conventional Guns						
Revolver, Lt. *SW M640 (.38 Special)*	4	12	3	6	P	
Revolver, Hvy. *Colt Anaconda (.44 Magnum)*	6	35	2	6	J	
Semi-Automatic Pistol, Lt. *Glock 17 (9mm)*	4	20	4	17+1	P	
Semi-Automatic Pistol, Hvy. *IMI Desert Eagle (.50 AE)*	5	30	3	7+1	J	
Rifle *Remington M-700 (30.06)*	8	200	1	5+1	N	
SMG, Small *Ingram Mac-10 (9mm)*	4	25	3	30+1	J	#1
SMG, Large *HK MP-5 (9mm)*	4	50	3	30+1	T	#1
Assault Rifle *AK-47 (7.62x39mm)*	7	150	3	42+1	N	#1
Shotgun, Sawed Off *Winchester Model 24 double barrel (12 Gauge)*	8	10	2	2	J	
Shotgun *Ithaca M-37 (12 Gauge)*	8	20	1	5+1	T	
Shotgun, Semi-Automatic *Benelli M4 (12 Gauge)*	8	25	3	6+1	T	
Shotgun, Assault *MPS AA-12 (12 Gauge)*	8	50	3	32+1	N	#1
Technocracy Sidearms #2						
Biggs X-5 Model R Protector	5	40	4	12	J	#3
Biggs X-5 Model A Protector	5	40	4	12+1	J	#1
Biggs Mjollner Mk. IV	10	100	1	10	T	#4
Castle-Graves WW-3	8	200	3	50+1	N	#1
Bolan Mk.13 Weapons System	(as noted below)					#1, #5
HIT Mark Chain-Gun	8	150	3	200	N	#1
Bows #6						
Short Bow	4	60	1	1	N	
Hunting Bow	5	100	1	1	N	
Long Bow	5	120	1	1	N	
Crossbow, Commando	3	20	1	1	J	#7
Crossbow	5	90	1	1	T	
Crossbow, Hvy.	6	100	1	1	N	

Taser	5	5	1	1	P	#8
Tear Gas	3	3	1	5	P	#8
Pacification Spray	5	3	1	5	P	#8
Military Weapons #9						
.30 Caliber Machine Gun	12	800	5	100	N	#1
.50 Caliber Machine Gun	16	1000	5	200	N	#1, #10
30 mm Cannon	15	1200	8	100	N	#1, #11
M-79 Grenade Launcher	400	8	1	1	N	#12
M-19 Grenade Launcher	600	2	1	1	N	#10, #12
Flamethrower	Napalm	60	1	Special	N	#12
Rocket Launcher	12-16	500+	1	1	N	#12

Notes

Damage: All damage from firearms and bows is lethal.

Range: Within listed range (in yards), difficulty is 6; at twice listed Range, difficulty is 8; within two yards, difficulty is 4.

Rate: Maximum number of bullets or three-round bursts the weapon can fire in a single turn.

Clip: Maximum number of bullets the weapon can hold. Some weapons, listed as "+1", can hold a full clip with a round ready in the chamber.

Conceal: See ***Melee Weapons*** chart.

#1 = Gun may fire full-auto, three-round bursts, and strafing sprays.

#2 = All category weapons except chain-gun feature laser sights and can be used by Sleepers and extraordinary citizens; issued only to Technocracy personnel of extraordinary citizen level or higher.

#3 = Revolver; at the touch of a button, can chamber any type of ammunition loaded in the cylinder. Both Model R and Model A made of composite materials – invisible to metal detectors.

#4 = Rarely issued to unEnlightened personnel, as it tends to jam on a failed roll during unEnlightened use; still, more attuned to Consensus than it was years ago.

#5 = Combines a submachine gun main weapon (as per ***AK-47***; 50-shot clip) with auto-shotgun capabilities (as ***MPS AA-12***; 20-shot clip) through the main barrel, plus a grenade launcher under that barrel (as a ***MP-79***/ six-shot magazine). Laser sights. ***Heavy***; requires Strength 3 or better to employ but has relatively low recoil.

#6 = Long and short bows take an automatic action to nock and draw; crossbows require two automatic actions to reload. A character with Archery 3 or higher can nock, draw, and loose an arrow as a single action but cannot do the same thing with a crossbow.

#7 = Collapsible; requires one turn to unfold from storage configuration, plus one action to load once it has been unfolded.

#8 = Bashing damage, not lethal; adds no extra damage from successes scored. Tear gas and Technocratic pacification spray also reduce target's dice pools by two dice for one turn per success.

#9 = Requires Firearms specialization in Heavy Weapons and a Class C license to own legally in U.S.

#10 = Not man-portable; must be mounted on vehicle.

#11 = Chain-gun; not normally man-portable, but carried by some HIT Marks and heavy-duty cyborgs. Halves armor protection due to high-speed "drilling" effect.

#12 = See ***Explosives chart***.

Thrown Weapons

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage/Type	Conceal
Knife	6	Strength/L	P
Shuriken	7	3/L	P
Spear	6	Strength +1/L	N
Stone	5	Strength/B	varies
Stone, Large	5	Strength +3/B	N
Tomahawk	6	Strength +1/L	J

Special Ammunition Types

Type	Damage	Effects
Ectoplasmic Disruptors	5/A	Blasts spirit entities and vampires with aggravated damage explosion; normal damage to physical beings.
Explosive Shells	6/L	Mini-grenades; six dice on target, minus one die/ yard from impact to max. of -6 dice; usable only in shotguns and Technocratic firearms.
Flechettes	7/L	Tiny darts; modern body armor reduced by -2 to protection from this ammo, but old-style thick armor counts as double for this ammo only; only from shotguns and Technocratic firearms.
Incendiary Rounds	4/A	Phosphorus – ignites in air when fired; inflict two dice aggravated damage for one turn after they hit; ignite flammable objects.
Rubber Bullets	B	Damage as normal bullets for the gun, but bashing, not lethal.
Taser Bullets	5/B	Electrical charge inflicts 5 levels bashing for two turns; Technocratic special ammo.
Tear Gas Rounds	B	Fills two meter radius with tear gas – see *Toxins*, below; shotguns and Technocratic firearms only.
Teflon Bullets	L	Damage as per normal bullets for the gun, but reduce armor protection value by -1.

Special Gun Sights

Type	Difficulty Reduction	Notes #1
Laser Sight	-1	One turn to aim.
Sniper Scope	-2	Two turns to aim.
Night Vision Scope	-1	Dark only; also lets shooter see in darkness.
Computer Targeting	-3	One turn to aim.

#1 = Scopes add two dice to shooter's dice pool for the first shot only.

Environmental Hazards

Fire Damage

Heath Levels/ Turn	Size of Fire
One	Torch; part of body burned
Two	Bonfire; half of body seared
Three	Inferno; body engulfed

Soak Difficulties	Heat of Fire
3	Candle (first degree burns)
5	Campfire (second degree burns)
7	Bunsen burner (third degree)
8	Electrical fire
9	Chemical fire
10	Molten lava or metal

Electrocution

Health Levels/ Turn	Electrical Source
Two	Minor; wall socket
Four	Major; protective fence
Six	Severe; junction box
Eight	Fatal; subway rail

Explosives

Type	Blast Area	Blast Power	Burn	Notes
Toxic Gas Grenade	4	N/A	No	#1
Concussion Grenade	3	8 dice	No	#2
Fragmentation Grenade	3	12 dice	No	
Molotov Cocktail	2	8 dice	Yes	#3
IED	3-5	8-15 dice	Depends	#4
Suicide Bomb	4-6	10-15 dice	Depends	#5
Gasoline	3	2	Yes	#3
Gas Tank (car)	5	12 dice	Yes	#3
Car Bomb	5	20 dice	Depends	#4
Truck Bomb	20	30 dice	Depends	#4
Blasting Powder	1	1	Yes	#6
Dynamite	3-5	6 dice/ stick	Yes	
Nitroglycerin	4	3	No	#7
Plastique	1-6	1-20	No	#8
Napalm	10-50	Special	Yes	#9
Small Rocket	3-6	10-15 dice	No	
Artillery Shell	10	20-30 dice	No	
Nuke	1-30 miles	Seriously?	Yes	#3

Notes

Blast Area: Center of explosion, measured in 10' increments; all characters and objects take full damage within Blast Area, -1 success for each yard outward from there.

Blast Power: Number of dice rolled per pound or ½ gallon of explosive; sometimes simply a dice pool instead.

Burn: Whether or not the explosive also ignites fires.

Damage lethal unless noted.

#1 = See ***Toxins chart***.

#2 = Bashing damage, not lethal.

#3 = Aggravated damage.

#4 = Might also be incendiary (aggravated damage + fire) or shrapnel (half armor protection).

#5 = Strapped to, or inside of, user; kills user upon ignition. Also, #4.

#6 = Loose gun- or flash powder; also creates blinding flare when ignited.

#7 = Liquid, unstable; may ignite upon impact.

#8 = May be shaped for precise explosion area; stable until ignited by electronic detonator.

#9 = Jellied gasoline; aggravated damage. Storyteller rolls one die to determine how much flaming napalm hits a given character, then rolls that many dice per turn for 10 turns. Not extinguished by water, only by total lack of oxygen. Successful dodge reduces damage dice pool by one die per success.

Dodging the Blast

Difficulty	Size of Explosion
6	Small detonation (grenade, Molotov cocktail)
8	Large explosion (gas tanks, small bombs, IEDs)
9	Huge explosion (artillery rounds, tanker trucks, truck bombs)

Toxins

Toxin Rating	Difficulty	Disease	Poison or Drug
One	6	Cold (B)	Alcohol (B), Cocaine (B), Tear Gas (cloud, B)
Two	7	Chicken Pox (B), Food Poisoning (B), MRSA (L)	Methamphetamine (B), Methanol (L)
Three	7	Influenza (B); Cancer, Early (L); Pneumonia (L)	Ptomaine (B), Tainted Water (B), Belladonna (L)
Four	8	HIV (L); Leprosy (L); Cancer, Advanced (L)	Salmonella (B), Ammonia (L), Fouled Water (B)
Five	8	Severe Flu (B/L); Cholera (B); Cancer, Extensive (L)	Bleach (L), Industrial Waste (L), Chlorine Gas (L)
Six	9	Bubonic Plague (L), Anthrax (L)	Strong Acids (L)
Seven	9/T3	Ebola (avoid as cloud, L)	Sarin (L), Cyanide (L), Acidic Sludge (L)

Notes: Clouds of toxins inflict damage per turn spent within the cloud without gas protection gear and cannot be dodged; to avoid the effects, a character needs protective gear or Life 2 magick. Many toxic chemicals work on skin contact and cannot be avoided by holding one's breath. Clouds also drift with wind and may be dispersed or spread with Forces 2 or higher Effects.

Objects

Durability	Substance is...
1	Fragile (normal glass, thin wood or ceramic)
2	Breakable (sturdy glass, plywood, crockery)
3	Breakable but tough (interior door, safety glass, drywall, thin metal)
4	Strong and rigid
5	Strong and flexible
6	Solid
7	Solid and thick
8	Solid, thick, and reinforced
9	Thick, solid, and dense
10	Exceedingly strong and dense
11+	Damn near impenetrable

Structure	Object is...
1	Fragile (wine glass, light bulb)
2-3	Easily broken (window, laptop, drywall)
4-5	Sturdy and complex (car engine, camera, printer)
6-7	Sturdy and simple (table, plank, tire, thick door, brick wall)
8-9	Thick and simple (stone wall, streetlight pole, metal bulkhead)
10	Thick and reinforced (safe, bank vault, building foundation)
11+	Built to take enormous punishment (airliner, ship, military vehicle)

Holding Breath

Stamina	Holding Breath
1	30 seconds
2	One minute
3	Two minutes
4	Four minutes
5	Eight minutes
6	15 minutes
7	20 minutes
8	30 minutes
9	45 minutes
10	One hour

Sample Objects and Surfaces

Object/Surface	Durability	Structure	Damage	Notes
		Barriers		
Window	1-3	1-3	1	#1
Plexiglas	3-5	5	2	
Screen Door	2	2	N/A	
Flimsy Door	1	5	1	
Thick Door	2-4	5-7	2	
Metal Door	3-5	6-8	4	
Vault Door	10	10-18	8	
Drywall	3	2-4	1	#2
Wooden Wall	3-5	6-8	2	#2
Brick Wall	6-8	6-8	3	#2
Stone Wall	6-9	8-9	3	#2
Steel Wall	7-10	8-15	4	#2
Chain Link Fence	2	6	1	#2
Wooden Fence	2-4	3-6	2	#2
Metal Fence	3-4	7-10	3	#2
		Furniture		
Chair	3-4	4-6	1-2	
Coffin	2	7	2	
Computer	1-3	2-4	1-2	
Couch	3	7	3	
Lamp	1-2	2-3	1	
Shelving Unit	3-4	6-7	2	
Table/Desk	2-4	4-6	2-3	
TV	2	2	2	
		Street Objects		
Mailbox	2-3	2-6	1-2	
Manhole Cover	4	6	3	
Metal Bars	4-8	6-7	2	
Street Light	5	8-9	3	
Tree	5-10	10+	3-5	#3

Notes

Durability: Overall hardness and/ or thickness.

Structure: Useful integrity; when damage exceeds Structure, the object is broken.

Damage: The number of dice the surface or object adds to an attacker's bashing damage pool if he uses that object or surface as an improvised weapon.

#1 = Damage lethal if glass gets shattered before use as a weapon; doubled for heavy-duty glass.

#2 = Damage reflects being hit with a piece of the wall or being slammed hard into it.

#3 = Extremely varied, depending on age, type, and size of tree.

Part V: The Technological World

For all that certain mages go on about the glories of the Mythic Age, their world is our world, and our world's full of technology. From car chases to gadgeteering upgrades, that technology comes into play fairly often in a **Mage: The Ascension** chronicle. The following systems certainly won't reflect every conceivable use of technology in your game, but they'll help your troupe address many common moments of technological mayhem.

Vehicle Systems

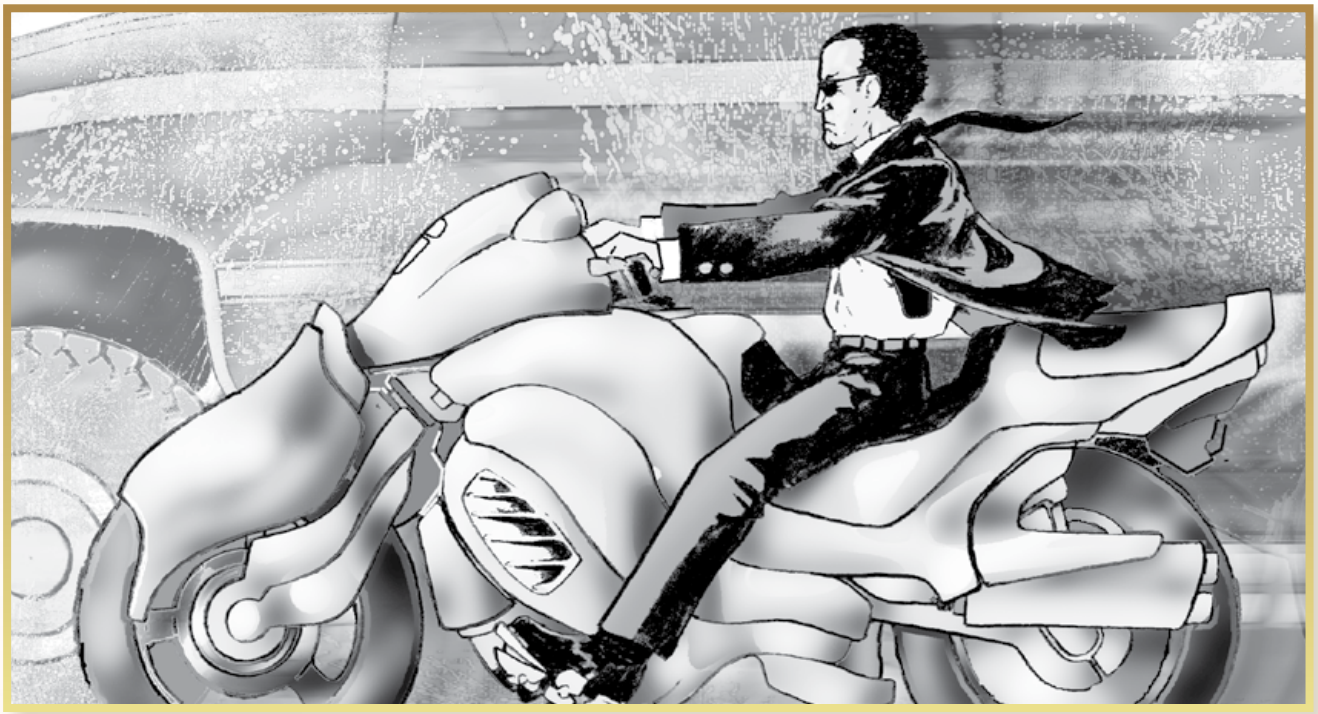
Until the early 1900s, you walked, rode a horse, or spent lots of time in some rickety contraption that tended to be slow, uncomfortable, and subject to weather conditions. But ever since the inventions of internal combustion, the automobile, and highly durable materials during the mid- to late 1800s, most people have traveled great distances at high speed and think nothing of it. The Technocracy, of course, is quick to claim credit for such innovations. Whatever their origins might be, however, our vehicles are part of our daily lives.

In game terms, characters might find themselves in high-speed chases, drive-bys, tense repair situations, and other sorts of vehicular chaos. And although **Mage**'s Storyteller System avoids detailed transportation rules (whole games have been built around such details!), it's worth knowing what happens if you grab a jetpack or hop inside an armored limousine.

Vehicle Traits

For the most part, vehicles are best handled as story elements – characters get in them and go. For those times when the magick meets the road, though, the following Traits define the essential systems for common vehicles.

- **Safe/ Max. Speed:** *Safe Speed* reflects how fast a character can drive the vehicle in question without risking a wreck; for every 10 MPH over that limit, add +1 to the difficulty of that character's operation rolls. *Max. Speed* is more or less where that vehicle tops out.
- **Maneuverability:** Certain vehicles handle better than others. *Maneuverability* reflects the maximum dice pool a character can use when operating this vehicle. (This applies only to the dice pool used for driving, of course… although it's also hard to seduce someone in the middle of a high-speed chase.)
- **Crew:** The minimum personnel needed to operate the vehicle. *Pass.* (passengers) reflects the number of people, other than the operators, who'll fit into the vehicle under normal circumstances. Cramming is possible, of course, but it may affect the vehicle's ability to function.
- **Durability:** The number of health levels it takes to penetrate the vehicle's body; until that point, damage just bounces off the surface.
- **Structure:** The amount of damage the vehicle can take before it's too destroyed to function as more than a block



Optional Rule: Minimum Driving Skill

Cars are easy to drive; 18-wheelers are not. As an *optional rule,* assume that driving a car requires at least one dot in Drive before you can do so competently, but driving vehicles in the ***Truck*** class demands at least three dots. Any character can certainly get behind the wheel of such a vehicle... but *control* it? Not likely.

Cycles are notoriously difficult too. You may assume that a character needs at least one dot in Athletics in order to operate a bicycle, a Dexterity of at least three to operate a unicycle, and no fewer than three dots in Drive (or perhaps a specialty in Motorcycles) in order to avoid smearing himself across the pavement on a motorcycle. Again, a character can mount a cycle and maybe move slowly down the street on it under calm conditions. If she needs to exert control over that bike and its velocity, though, that's another matter entirely...

of wreckage. (Granted, Matter and Entropy magick can do wonderfully creative things with wreckage...)

- **Weapons:** This Trait speaks for itself. See the ***Combat*** section for details.

For vehicle repair, modification, hotwiring, and car-stripping rules, see ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology,*** (p. 463-464).

Stunt Driving

To commit gross acts of vehicular insanity, a roll of Dexterity + Drive (or Pilot, Jetpack, or other appropriate Ability) reflects your character's skill. The difficulty for that roll depends upon the craziness of the stunt and possibly the conditions involved as well (icy road, flat tires, shattered windshield, etc.); typically, such stunts start at difficulty 4 and go upward from there.

Remember, though, that the Maneuverability Trait limits that dice pool, and exceeding the vehicle's Safe Speed adds to the difficulty of that roll.

Let's say, for example, that Lee Ann Milner tries to pull a bootlegger reverse. If she's driving a sports car, her Dexterity + Drive dice pool has an upper limit of 9; if she's driving an SUV, drop that limit to 5; and if she tries to do it with an RV... well, good luck with that, Lee Ann!

Botches while driving are bad. Seriously, don't botch a stunt driving roll.

Ramming and Collisions

In order to avoid absurdly complicated rules, assume that a vehicle ramming a character inflicts that vehicle's Durability in bashing damage, plus one die for every 10 MPH (14" per turn) that the vehicle was traveling at the time. Thus, a crotch-rocket motorcycle ramming someone at 50 MPH inflicts eight dice of bashing damage, but a limo going at that speed inflicts 10.

Certain vehicles inflict additional dice of damage simply because they're bigger and harder than a character is. The limo in question actually inflicts 13 dice of damage because it *hurts* to get rammed by a limo. (For additional levels of damage, see the charts below.)

Passengers inside a colliding vehicle take the usual damage, minus that vehicle's Durability rating; if they're strapped in, halve the damage they would normally suffer. In many cases, the Storyteller can simply employ the cinematic trope of having important characters more or less unharmed and unnecessary characters incapacitated or killed in a crash.

For additional details about getting clipped by vehicles or the people in them, see ***Ramming and Slamming*** (p. 439).

Drive-By Shooting and Passenger Concealment

Characters firing from inside a moving vehicle suffer a penalty of between -1 (low speed) to -3 (high speed). This goes up, of course, if they're moving through rough or obstructing terrain (rain, fog, ice, off-road, etc.).

Characters inside a vehicle are typically protected by that vehicle's Durability. Unless the shooter rolls four successes or more to hit her target, assume that the vehicle protects the passengers. A targeted shot through the window normally adds +3 to the shooter's difficulty, although smaller windows (say, like on an armored car) may add +5 or more.

Certain attacks, of course, can easily exceed that Durability rating; in that case, the passengers might take damage from the attack, minus the vehicle's Durability rating. For typical firearms, just figure that the usual cinematic "car protects the passengers" rule applies; however, for heavy weapons – .50 caliber machine guns, rocket launchers, pulse cannons, etc. – a shot that rolls at least four successes to hit *and* penetrates the vehicle's Durability has a good chance of hitting a passenger as well. That chance depends upon the size of the vehicle relative to the size and number of its passengers. It's far easier, after all, to hit one of the two people in a tiny sports car than to hit a specific one of the 30 people in a bus.

Shooting the Gas Tank

Movies notwithstanding, it's pretty hard to blow up a car by shooting at its gas tank. But because exploding cars make great coincidental Forces attacks, it's worth noting that an attack on a vehicle's gas tank demands at least three successes on the attack roll, and must inflict no fewer than six health levels' worth of damage, before the fuel goes off.

An exploding car detonates for roughly 12 dice of flaming aggravated damage. Larger vehicles (helicopters, boats, tanker trucks, etc.) can inflict far more. For details, see ***Explosions*** in the ***Environmental Hazards*** section.

Vehicles

Wheeled Street Vehicles

Vehicle	Safe Speed	Max. Speed	Maneuver	Crew	Durability	Structure	Weapons
Cycles (Durability does not protect rider; see *Minimum Driving Skill*)							
Unicycle	1 x Strength	3 x Strength	5	1	1	3	N/A
Mountain Bike	3 x Strength	8 x Strength	5	1	2	4	N/A
Racing Bike	4 x Strength	10 x Strength	6	1	2	3	N/A
Dirt Bike (Motorcycle)	50	80	9	1	4	4	N/A
Light Motorcycle	75	130	8	1	2	3	N/A
Touring Motorcycle	90	170	5	1 (1 pass.)	4	4	N/A
Crotch Rocket	100	200	7	1	2	3	N/A
Badass Hypercycle	120	250	7	1	5	5	#1
ATV	30	70	5	1	3	5	N/A
Cars (Mass inflicts +1 die of damage)							
Jeep	60	80	6	1 (4 pass.)	4	6	#2
Compact Car	70	130	6	1 (1 pass.)	3	3	N/A
Midsize Sedan	70	120	5	1 (3 pass.)	3	4	N/A
Station Wagon	80	120	4	1 (5 pass.)	3	5	N/A
Sports Car	130	200	9	1 (1 pass.)	3	4	N/A
Street Racer	70	240	8	1 (1 pass.)	4	4	N/A
Cop Car	80	200	7	1 (3 pass.)	5	5	N/A
Police Interceptor	100	250	8	1 (3 pass.)	5	5	N/A
Bond Q Division Supercar	100	250	10	1 (1 pass.)	6	5	#2
Trucks (mass inflicts + 3 dice in impact-based damage; + 3 protection to passengers)							
Limo	70	110	4	1 (5 pass.)	4	6	N/A
Armored Lim0	70	100	4	1 (5 pass.)	8	6	#2
Stretch Car	80	100	3	1 (5-7 pass.)	3	5	N/A
Pickup Truck	70	110	5-7	1 (1-4 pass.)	3	6	N/A
SUV/ Van	60	120	6	1 (3-7 pass.)	4	7	N/A
Armored Supervan	50	100	5	1 (3 pass.)	10	10	N/A
Off-Road Truck	60	90	5	1 (1-3 pass.)	4	7	N/A
Hummer	80	120	5	1 (1-5 pass.)	5	8	#2
Armored Car	60	80	4	1 (1-5 pass.)	10	10	N/A
RV	60	80	3	1 (1-5 pass.)	3	8	N/A
Bus	60	100	3	1 (20+ pass.)	4	8	N/A
Large Truck	60	110	4-5	1 (1 pass.)	4	6	N/A
Heavy Truck	60	100	4	1 (5+ pass.)	6	8	N/A
18-Wheeler	70	110	4	1 (1 pass.)	5	8	N/A

Wheeled Street Vehicles (Continued)

Notes

#1 = May mount any two of the following options: two **.30 caliber machine guns** (Difficulty 6, Damage 12, Rate 5, Range 800 yards, Capacity 100 shots); **oil slick jet** (Difficulty 4, -6 to pursuers' Drive rolls, 4 shots); **smoke screen jet** (Difficulty 4, -4 to pursuers' Perception and Drive rolls, 4 shots); **six rockets** (Difficulty 8, Damage 15, Rate 1, Range 3000 yards, Capacity 1 shot); one **30 mm cannon** (Difficulty 7, Damage 15, Rate 8, Range 1200 yards, Capacity 50 shots).

#2 = Civilian vehicles have no weapons. Military vehicles may mount one of the following options: two twin-mounted **.30 caliber machine guns** (above); one **30 mm cannon** (above); one mounted **.50 caliber machine gun** (Difficulty 7, Damage 12, Rate 5, Range 1000 yards, Capacity 200 shots); one **M-19 grenade launcher** (Difficulty 6, Damage as grenade, Rate 1, Range 400 yards, Capacity 1 shot); one **TOW rocket** (Difficulty 6, Damage 16, Rate 1, Range 2500 yards, Capacity 1 shot).

Weaponized vehicles may also carry concealed technomagickal Devices – see ***The Toybox, Chapter Ten***.

Military Vehicles

Requires min. 3 dots in Drive + appropriate Specialty to operate at all;
mass inflicts + 5 dice in impact-based damage. Passengers get full protection from Durability.

Vehicle	Safe Speed	Max. Speed	Maneuver	Crew	Durability	Structure	Weapons
APC	30	60	4	2 (11 pass.)	12	15	!
Riot Tank	30	50	3	2	10	15	!!
Light Tank	20	30 (on road)	2	4	18 (front)/ 15 sides	18	!!!
Heavy Tank	30	50 (on road)	2	4	22 (front)/ 20 (sides)	25	!!!!

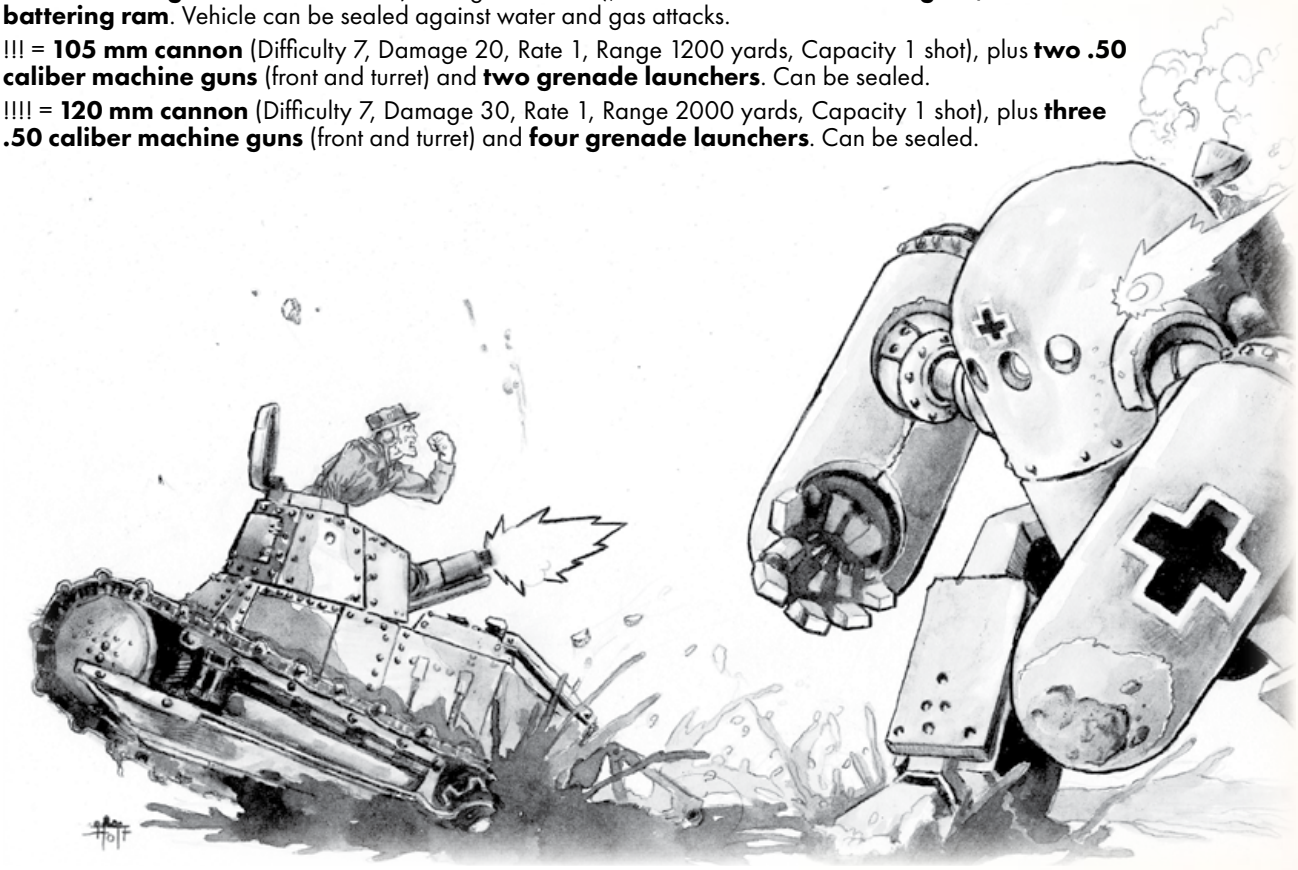
Notes

! = As #2, preceding chart.

!! = **Two M-19 grenade launchers** (to fire gas canisters), **two .30 caliber machine guns,** and **one battering ram**. Vehicle can be sealed against water and gas attacks.

!!! = **105 mm cannon** (Difficulty 7, Damage 20, Rate 1, Range 1200 yards, Capacity 1 shot), plus **two .50 caliber machine guns** (front and turret) and **two grenade launchers**. Can be sealed.

!!!! = **120 mm cannon** (Difficulty 7, Damage 30, Rate 1, Range 2000 yards, Capacity 1 shot), plus **three .50 caliber machine guns** (front and turret) and **four grenade launchers**. Can be sealed.



Aircraft

Requires Pilot Skill to operate at all; military aircraft require at least 3 dots in Pilot + appropriate specialty. Passengers get full protection from Durability.

Vehicle	Safe Speed	Max. Speed	Maneuver	Crew	Durability	Structure	Weapons
Hot Air Balloon	Wind	Wind	0	1 (3 pass.)	4	4	N/A
Jetpacks (requires Jetpack Skill; Durability does not protect wearer; technomagickal vehicle.)							
Jetpack	100	250	10	1	4	4	N/A
Ornithopter	120	200	10	1	4	2	N/A
Helicopters (requires Pilot + Helicopter specialty. Except for gyrocopter, Durability protects passengers.)							
Gyrocopter	70	150	5	1	3	3	N/A
News Copter	140	220	6	1 (1 pass.)	4	6	N/A
Large Helicopter	150	250	6	2 (4 pass.)	5	6	N/A
Attack Chopper	180	280	9	3	12	10	!
Military Utility Helicopter	180	280	7	3 (10 pass.)	8	10	!!
Black Helicopter	200	400	10	2	13	13	!!!
Small Planes (requires Pilot; military planes require Fighter Jet specialty. Durability protects passengers.)							
Small Prop	110	170	5	1 (3 pass.)	5	6	N/A
Medium Prop	180	230	4	2 (10 pass.)	6	8	N/A
Large Prop	300	400	3	2 (50 pass.)	6	10	N/A
Lear Jet	350	450	4	2 (20 pass.)	8	15	N/A
Fighter Jet	Mach 2	Mach 2.5	7	1	8	15	!!!!

Notes

! = **30 mm cannon**, **16 TOW missiles**, **16 rockets** (all as previous).

!! = **Two .30 caliber machine guns**; or **two 30 mm cannon**s; or six **rocket**s and **two .30 caliber machine guns**.

!!! = **Two .30 caliber machine guns**, **two 30 mm cannons**, **12 rockets**, and **16 TOW missiles**. Also features stealth mode (Arcane 5 except vs. Technocrats) and requires Perception roll (difficulty 6) to hear. Requires Technocratic exceptional citizen crew.

!!!! = **20 mm cannon** (Difficulty 7, Damage 15, Rate 3, Range 1000 yards, Capacity 100 shots); **four Sidewinder missiles** (Difficulty 8, Damage 15, Rate 2, Range many miles), **six Sparrow A1M-7P missiles** (Difficulty 8, Damage 20, Rate 2, Range 30 miles, and **14 250-lb. smart bombs** (Difficulty 6, Damage 40).

Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology

Who says that magick has to look like old bones and musty books? For many mages of the 21st century – of *any* century, for that matter – the gears and wires of apparently mundane technology can become vehicles for Enlightened miracles.

Even without magick, a skillful mage can improve existing technology, invent new gadgets, or modify one thing into another. The various Spheres can assist such projects, of course, but the foundation of such tasks comes from innovation and skilled labor – sweat equity, not mystic shortcuts. And so, when your Etherite adventurer wants to soup up her Camaro, or your Hollow One tinkers with a sound system, the following rules reflect the things a smart mechanic can do to apparently mundane tech... with and without Sphere Effects.

As shown on the ***Art and Science*** portions of the ***Dramatic Feats*** entry and its related charts, the design, creation, and jury-rigging process involves a number of rolls if you want to play it out in game terms. Naturally, a character needs tools, a work space, and the necessary materials before she can make or update something without vulgar magick. The world's greatest mechanic still can't turbocharge an old VW bug without serious investments of time, gear, and grease, both elbow and otherwise. Sure, he could knock three times on the engine block with a rusty screwdriver, but unless he's just trying to make it go like it did before ("*You've gotta know where to hit 'em JUST RIGHT...*"), his explanation's not gonna fly and neither is the car.

Repair and Modification

Modern mages love to tinker. If your character repairs or modifies a vehicle or other mechanical contraption, assume that the task involves an extended roll with the appropriate Attribute + Ability. (Again, see ***Art and Science*** on the ***Dramatic Feats chart***.) Suitable Traits include Computer, Crafts (with the appropriate specialty), Hypertech, Science (again, with a given specialty), and Technology. Each roll reflects an hour or two of work, with several sample tasks on the chart nearby to give you guidelines for the successes involved in each task.

To determine difficulties and successes, check the ***Modification and Repair chart***, which can be used for both vehicle work and other mechanical repairs. A well-stocked workshop can lower the difficulty by -1 to -3, but improvised repairs without proper tools increase it by +1 to +3. Given time and materials, a good mechanic can fix or modify almost anything. Use rolls and charts only when you're racing against the clock, working with limited resources, or trying to do something that's theoretically impossible.

It's easier to work with what you already have than to create something that hadn't been there before. Modifying your old Saturn, for instance, involves less effort than building a whole new car from scratch. It's also easier to improve on junk than it is to upgrade a high quality-machine; the better the original craftsmanship, the bigger the challenge you face.

Story-wise, repairs and upgrades demand time, labor, parts, tools, and space, as noted above. Although it *is* possible for a

Modification and Repair

Job	Difficulty	# of Successes
Diagnostics	6	5
Routine Maintenance	4	2
Simple Repair	4	3
Major Repair	7	10
Extensive Repair	7	20
Fitting New Part	6	10
Security Override [#1]	8	3
System Overhaul	7	15
Minor Modification	7	5
Major Modification	8	15
New Capabilities	8	20
Hotwiring [#1]	5	3
Strip-n-Chop [#1]	6	15
Electronic Malfunction	5	5
Technical Glitch	9	2
Jury-Rig	+1	+2
Quick-n-Dirty	+2	+3
On the Fly	+3	+5

Notes: #1 = Can also involve Wits + Streetwise at +2 difficulty.

Quality of Device

Type of Device	Difficulty Modifier
Junk	-2
Cheap/ Poorly Made	-1
Average Commercial Quality	+0
Expensive/ High Quality	+2
Custom Made	+3
Cutting-Edge Prototype	+4

Invention

Type of Invention	Difficulty	# of Successes
Moderate improvement on an existing device	8	5
Significant improvement on existing device	9	10
Brand new device based on new or unconventional principles	10	20

skilled and powerful mage to gesture a few times and make parts fly together on their own, that sort of thing is spectacularly vulgar.

Jury-Rigging

For quick and dirty improvements – like a pair of machine guns grafted onto your Dodge pickup truck, or some special improvements to make that truck go faster – a successful jury-rigging roll allows for short-term improvements.

After a scene or two, however, those improvements start to break down, causing damage to the machine in question. ("*But Captain – she canna handle the strain much longer...*") In order to keep those improvements permanently, the mechanic needs to make extensive modifications –very probably with a bit of Matter or other Spheres thrown in for good measure.

The ***Modification and Repair chart*** shows three levels of jury-rigged modifications and repairs. *Jury-Rig* assumes a bit of time and materials, *Quick-n-Dirty* reflects a slapdash job with minimal time and resources, and *On the Fly* represents the sort of wing-and-a-prayer job you do when the Hordes of Hell are bearing down on you and all you've got to work with is the contents of your pockets and the junk scattered at your feet. All three options add to the difficulty of the repairs or modifications listed above, and all three require more successes than usual.

Inventing Devices

Innovation is the hallmark of brilliant technomancers everywhere. Although it's not something that comes up often in the heat of battle, any self-respecting machine-mage has a project or three scattered across her workshop. For times when you want to introduce a new gadget or vehicle to the chronicle, put the following guidelines to good use.

Before you can build some great new thing, you'll need to hash out the principles, work through the bugs, and tinker with prototypes until you reach a semi-workable design. In story terms, this sort of thing can take months or years of brainstorming, research, and frustration. Game-wise, the ***Research and Design*** entries in the ***Arts and Sciences*** category of the ***Dramatic Feats chart*** reflect the brainstorming process. The ***Invention*** listing covers the process of putting the pieces together into something that works, and the ***Invention chart*** nearby features guidelines for the difficulties and successes involved in the process, as well as the successes necessary to complete each step of that process.

It's worth remembering that a functional invention must still be something that can exist within the Consensus and operate by currently understood scientific principles. A radical invention – like the computer chip in the 1970s – may be possible, but it will require extensive testing, refinement, and propaganda before it'll be accepted as viable technology. That's one of the reasons that Etherites, Technocrats, and Virtual Adepts publicize their favorite theories and inventions: popular acceptance makes those creations viable. (See the **Chapter Six** sidebar ***SCIENCE!!!***)

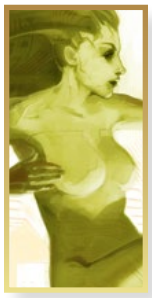
Inventions that defy the current laws of reality are capital-D Devices... that is, magickal items. For those sorts of inventions, see the ***Cybernetics***, ***Hypertech***, and ***Weird Science*** practices in **Chapter Ten**'s section ***Focus and the Arts***, as well as ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**. Again, invention requires space, time, materials, and labor. An invention without some serious workshop time is simply an idea.

Unconventional Enhancement

Mages of all kinds (most especially technomancers) can use the Matter and Prime Spheres to enhance the structure and power of a given machine. Using whichever tools and procedures seem appropriate to his focus, the mage crafts high-density cloth, advanced polymers, cold-fusion batteries, or other innovations to upgrade the quality and functions of a machine he creates.

In game terms, this simply translates to using Matter 2 or 3 to make advanced materials, Prime 2 to enhance a power supply, or other Spheres to add a bit of extra kick to the device in question. (Correspondence 1, for example, to a pair of binoculars, Forces to boost a Taser's shock, that sort of thing.) The player makes an Arete roll for coincidental magick, and each success over the first one adds an invisible but helpful boost to the object's properties. Using the ***Bustin' Stuff*** rules **(see pp. 439-440)**, the mage could add one point to the object's Durability or Structure for each success. Perhaps he might add to a weapon's damage dice pool (one extra die for every two successes), reflecting a super-sharp sword, for instance. He could also enhance the story-based quality of the item in question to make a car with paint that never scratches, a hat that never falls far from the mage's hands, and so forth. *Such enhancement does not make the item itself magickal* – just better than it would be otherwise. For magickal items, again see **Appendix II**.

Part VI: The Digital Web



Welcome to the front lines of the 21st century reality wars. Despite its origins in technological gadgetry and 20th century scientific principles, the Internet transcends the rigid rationalism of its foundations. It has, in many ways, failed the Utopian dreams of its initial explorers. And yet, the Digital Web has indeed opened the gates for Reality 2.0. That reality, however, seems more rooted in the Internet's effects on the material world than in some rarified virtual reality beyond Earthly human concerns.

The Internet of the early 21st century is a globe-spanning mass of contradictions. In certain regards, it's a dehumanizing playground where restless people distract themselves from the real world with petty bickering, pointless games, and near-anonymous echo chambers where truths, lies, and everything in between blur into overwhelming scads of information. And yet, it also opens the doors and windows – for better and worse – into the magnificent human drama. People live, love, get furious, and find redemption online, in that space where physical reality has little bearing on what does and does not feel "real".

Although they're still tools for industrial powers, the net and its ports of access – computers, cell phones, reliable Internet service, electricity, and so forth – are open to anyone who can get those tools to work. In the early '90s, net access was limited to computer nerds with expensive gear and impenetrable vocabularies; these days, the web is an essential part of life across the globe. Commerce depends upon it. Entertainment makes it hum. Social media – perhaps the greatest human innovation since the telephone – builds real-time bridges between people of all cultures, regions, and economic backgrounds. From Cambodian villagers to Berlin stockbrokers, everyone is more or less equal on the Internet.

So what about the Digital Web, that voracious playground of Virtual Adept futurians and Iteration X posthumanists? Now that the *Tron*-meets-the-Wild-West vibe of its early incarnations has given way to the most democratic medium since the printing press, what has happened to the Internet's metaphysical aspect – the living dimension shaped and accessed by pure information?

Well, it's grown a bit since then...

Virtual Crossroads

As described earlier in **Chapter Four**, the form and extent of the Internet in your **Mage** chronicle depends a lot on what you want to do with your setting as a whole. In a 1990s-style saga, the Digital Web retains its Great Race vibe, filled with grids and FREEKS and cyberpunk nostalgia. In a more contemporary game, however, the dilemmas shown in the sourcebook **Digital Web 2.0** have grown in size and complexity. By the late '90s, the Web's gatekeepers realized that their elite fantasies of anarchistic paradise or enlightened command had been blinked out by the chaos of the human world. In the aftermath of that particular wakeup call, they'd also confronted the herds of Sleepers who, for

better and worse, were beginning to claim the Web as their own... and they recognized, in the process, that their pristine ideals of light and code were being consumed by the humanity they'd thought they could leave behind.

Beyond that comprehension, the smarter netizens now understand that the theories of Web consciousness were correct. The Internet *is* alive, *is* feeding off the life energies of its visitors, *is* growing exponentially and uplifting itself by the square root of human knowledge. What apparently began as a rip in time/space ostensibly torn by Alan Turing is now revealing itself to be a godlike meta-being whose ultimate nature and agendas remain alien – yet achingly familiar, because they come from *us*. Those who understand and ponder such things now wonder what the Digital Web wants... what it craves... what it might desire in a few years that it hasn't processed yet... and what it will do with us if and when humanity really *has* abdicated Meatspace for the world online.

Meanwhile, the groups that once aspired to leave their flesh behind – the transhumanist visionaries of Virtual Adepts, Iteration X, and other cyber-topians – have largely shifted focus. The old plans of uploading one's self into the Internet forever were crashed by the great Whiteout of 1997, when Doissetep's implosion proved that the Digital Web was not immune to events outside its space. Moreover, the shifting focus of life on Earth in the Age of Terror (with or without an Avatar Storm and Reckoning) encourages people to look for solutions in Meatspace before our entire world blinks out for good. More and more often now, the Internet is regarded as a tool of revolution, not an escape hatch for the digitized elite.

As author and social oracle Erik Davis points out in his book *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, the Internet is the dominion of crossroads trickster gods: Hermes, Legba, Coyote, Lucifer. It's both the ivory tower of the empowered elite and the back door to that stronghold. A crossways between passion and technology, abstract faith and hard mathematics, the net provides a techno-temple for sacred profanations. It's the marketplace of dreams and the outhouse of our collective imagination – raised with weapons, stocked with data, infused with righteous fury, and cemented with pornography.

Today's Virtual Adepts, then, favor the Trickster Hermes in his guise of the enlightened prankster thief. Functioning as his Mercurian Elite, they use the Internet – both its mundane form and its Digital Web aspect – as a six-dimensional chessboard for defeating tyranny and Enlightening humanity... not by projecting everyone on Earth online, but by using the power of information access to tear down established paradigms and open the doors to a techgnostic golden age in which information holds the keys to Ascension.

(For more details about these concepts, see ***Gnosticism*** in **Chapter One**, (p. 39), and ***Techgnosis and Transhumanism*** in **Chapter Four**, (p. 105.)

Digital Web Systems

So what rules do you employ when this ever-expanding Web appears in your chronicle? In several regards, that depends upon your Storyteller. The intricate layers and rule systems contained in **Digital Web 2.0** range far beyond the capacity of this chapter... and, in any case, they might be obsolete or altered significantly in a new-millennium **Mage** chronicle. Although there is, as of this writing, a sourcebook called **Digital Web 3.0** in the works, the exact contents and rule systems of that book have yet to be codified. What, then, should a Storyteller do?

With a few exceptions (most of which are outlined below), the 21st century Digital Web should be simpler to employ and closer, in most regards, to Earth than it was in the early days. After all, the real-life Internet is easier to use in 2015 than it was in 1994, so the cumbersome rules systems presented in the original **Digital Web** sourcebook are clearly obsolete. These days, adventures in the Web are more like adventures in material reality than they were back then. This era's netizens are more native to that environment than the old school Web-spinners were, and the Web itself has – for better and worse – become more like our world than it used to be.

As far as rules are concerned, we suggest treating the Digital Web as a Realm of the Middle Umbra, subject to Whiteout Paradox backlashes and accessed by several forms of astral and metaphysical projection, as outlined under ***Web Access***, below. Keep things as simple as possible, and treat weird online life forms as spirit entities – several of which appear in **Appendix I**. If and when you want to get into the more complex and peculiar aspects of the Digital Web, check out **Digital Web 2.0**. Although those systems are based in the late '90s, many of the specific rules still apply.

Web Access

Beyond the obvious web-surfing techniques employed by normal people (see the ***Dramatic Feats chart*** earlier in this chapter), Awakened/ Enlightened people use the following methods to project themselves online:

Sensory Visitation

The quick and easy way to enter the Web involves simply strapping on the right gear and logging in. Any Sleeper can do this, although most mortals figure that what they're seeing is cool graphics, not actual reality.

In the old days, sensory visitation required bulky VR gear. Now all it demands is a pair of high-end net-access sunglasses, maybe with a pair of sleek VR gloves for tactile contact. Certain gaming platforms provide a limited interface for sensory visitation through screens, keyboards, and other related devices. Sure, this virtual reality looks like state-of-the-art graphics... and it *is*. Still, there's more to that *World of Woecraft* game than most people think. Why else would it be so addictive?

Story-wise, sensory visitation projects the traveler's visual, audio, and – to a limited degree – tactile senses into the Web. Through the interface, her mind visits the Web even though her physical body remains at home. Although her contact with that online world holds certain limitations, she sends a part of her consciousness into that space.

System-wise, sensory visitation requires only the proper equipment. Anyone can do it, although few people understand

Optional Rule: The Data Sphere

In the **Revised** sourcebook for the **NWO**, an *optional rule* allows certain characters to replace the Correspondence Sphere with a related Sphere: *Data*. Essentially, the character regards the usual Correspondence principles as aspects of information. Detailed in **Chapter Ten**, this option reflects the practice of compiling and correlating data to connect things to one another.

If your group chooses to employ this option, a character using Data instead of the Correspondence Sphere reduces all Digital Web-based magick difficulties by -1. Essentially, his approach to data works exceptionally well in a Zone in which reality and principles are based upon mathematical information.

just *what* it is they're doing. A traveler uses several Mental Traits in place of Physical ones: Intelligence instead of Strength and Wits instead of Dexterity. Thanks to that uneasy separation of body and mind, all rolls for a visiting character receive a +1 difficulty penalty; that used to be +2 in the old days, but the interface has improved since then, and people are more attuned to computer simulations than they were in the '90s.

Astral Immersion

At the next level of Web access, a traveler immerses herself into the Web through a limited form of astral projection. As the narrator mentioned in **Chapter Four**, this trick involves projecting your senses – and by extension, your sense of reality – into the Web. Thanks to a combination of good gear, a ready mind, and the skill to go where the visitor wants to go in the way she wants to go there, the average netizen can reach the deeper level of digital reality without actually downloading herself into the Web.

In game terms, astral immersion requires good VR equipment (by 2015, you could use a high-grade smart phone or tablet with correct programs and the right apps), an Intelligence + Computer roll (three successes, difficulty 7), and at least two dots in the Correspondence Sphere. If your group employs the ***Data Sphere option*** **(detailed in the sidebar and in Chapter Ten, pp. 524-525)**, the roll for that difficulty is 6 instead of 7. Again, the character uses Intelligence and Wits in place of Strength and Dexterity, which gives an edge to agile-minded netizens.

On both game and story levels, the astrally immersed character is vulnerable in Meatspace; her entire concentration remains focused on the Digital Web environment, leaving her body in a deep trance. Smart travelers leave alarms, guards, or allies, and other levels of security on their bodies; after all, if anything happens to the meat back home, that visit may become a one-way trip. On the positive end, they can drop out immediately if need be. Although the experience of going from one reality to another can be disorienting for a minute or so, the benefits of being able to ditch out on a bad situation kinda make up for the inconvenience of building a new icon when you return.

Holistic Immersion

Maximum access involves projecting one's own self into the Digital Web. Downloading the body as information, a high-end Trinary computer system disassembles the traveler's physical data and jacks it into a different level of reality. Although the necessary gear has been refined since the 1990s, this is still one hell of a stunt, requiring tremendous processing power and Enlightened technology.

Story-wise, the traveler becomes pure information; this requires at least seconds of processing time with the appropriate gear. Although rumors speculate that portable HI Devices exist, few people are crazy enough to trust their molecules to a glorified iPad, so such Devices might or might not exist.

Rules-wise, holistic immersion requires specially equipped Trinary computer Devices, an extended Intelligence + Computer roll (five successes, difficulty 7), and a Life 4/ Correspondence 2/ Forces 2 Effect. A character using the Data Sphere still faces difficulty 7, due to the physical nature of this *meta*physical download process. Each roll reflects 30 seconds of processing time. Any interruption during the transfer process disrupts the attempt and inflicts an immediate ***Paradox*** backlash upon the user. (See **Chapter Ten**.) Downloading yourself into a computer is, of course, extremely vulgar in all locations on Earth, so that backlash can be very, *very* nasty.

A holistically immersed character uses all of his usual Traits in all of the usual ways. For better and worse, he *is* in the Web. A traveler could also access the Web holistically by climbing into that Zone on the Pattern Web. See the ***Climbing From World to World*** entry in the **Otherworlds** section for details.

Web Traits

A traveler who enters the Web through either sensory visitation or astral immersion uses his Intelligence as Strength and his Wits as Dexterity. Stamina is still Stamina. Although his icon may take damage, his physical body rarely does. (See ***Digital Damage***, below.)

A holistically immersed character uses his normal Traits. Physically present, he enjoys and suffers all effects of his presence.

Icons

As with many computer and video games, netizens get to design their own small-a avatars to represent their virtual selves. Typically called *icons* **(see *Mind Matters, Icons, and Avatars*, Chapter Four, p. 107)**, these synthetic reflections can take whatever form a traveler can devise. Certain areas, called *Constraint Realms*, might limit the types of icon a person may wear within that area. In general, though, the netizen can

program an original design, download a predesigned one, or select a variety of virtual costumes to reflect her desired persona.

In story terms, netizens place great importance on clever, appealing, and imaginative icons. It's like dressing for an exclusive and very high-end Halloween party – the wrong icon marks you as someone unworthy of attention... or worse, worthy of the wrong *kind* of attention. Social interactions in the Web can slide up or down the difficulty scale based upon the icon you wear. It's always a good idea to keep several options in mind.

Crafting and Changing Icons

Game-wise, a player rolls Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 5, to design an original icon. Wearing a pregenerated one requires no roll. Icons start with a base Appearance of 1 and an Intimidation of 0. Each success allows the player to add one dot of Appearance, Intimidation, or both to her character's icon. Crafting a basic icon requires at least three successes, although taking one "off the rack" is more or less instantaneous if you don't much care what it looks like. A really good icon might demand five to 10 successes, with each roll reflecting five minutes or turns of game time.

Changing icons is quick and easy if your character has preloaded options that were created earlier. Such costume changes require one turn and no roll. Really radical or off-the-cuff transformations, however, demand a Manipulation + Computer roll, difficulty 5; each success allows you to shift one dot of Appearance, Intimidation, or both.

(As the ***Virus Infection*** entry points out below, it's also a good idea to outfit your icon with security software. See that entry for more details.)

Aside from Appearance and Intimidation, icons do not change a character's Traits or capabilities. Any additional abilities or accessories (fire breathing, wings, etc.) must be created with additional magicks. Fortunately, most forms of magick are coincidental within Webspace; for details, see ***Magick in the Web***, below.

Physics and Travel

Within the Web, space is space and objects are objects. Specific features might seem odd by Earthly standards, but things that *appear* to be real in the Web *are* real in the Web. A netizen can lean on a wall, walk down a street, or break a virtual chair over another icon's head. Especially given the elaborate physics engines involved in modern computer games and CGI, the digital world is as real to its inhabitants as our world is to us. **(With a few sensory quirks, however – see the *Flatlands* entry in Chapter Four, pp. 104-105.)**

Restriction Protocols

In a Restricted sector, netizens must obey certain protocols or else get booted out of the sector. This effect is immediate – it's essentially like grabbing a live power line without protective gear or magick.

From a game perspective, the boot does not require an attack roll. Although a generous Storyteller might allow a Wits + Computer roll (difficulty 9) in order to avoid the boot, the ejection from a Restricted sector is a function of the physics in that sector. A person violating a Restriction protocol is acting counter to established natural laws, not the will of someone who needs to catch the offender in the act.

Navigating between Web sectors involves *conduits*: streets, doors, passageways, hot links, etc. Certain Constraint Realms, however, might require you to "level up" before they'll let you in, which – as in any computer game – involves meeting certain conditions to achieve entry. To get around in unknown parts of Netspace may require a successful roll of Perception + Computer or Intelligence + Etiquette (with a specialty in Web Culture), or Area Knowledge (with a specialty in Digital Web).

Hot Links

A popular innovation from the late '90s allows travelers to access different places via a *hot link*: a flashing sign or object that connects a traveler with another Web sector. In this case, the traveler simply touches the hot link and pops into the other location. Such links rarely lead back to the original location, however, although a savvy traveler can backspace with a Correspondence 3 Effect.

Popping and Backspacing

"*He who controls Correspondence controls the Internet*." That's not entirely true, but a mage with three dots or more in the Correspondence Sphere certainly has an edge over visitors who do not. In the case of popping and backspacing, the netizen can hop back and forth between sectors so long as she has some idea where she's going and doesn't encounter a Constraint that blocks her access to and from that area.

Popping and backspacing usually employ a *pop prog*: a program that scans for a prospective location, logs that area, and focuses the Correspondence 3 Effect. Assuming that he's going back to his previous location within a minute or two of arrival, the traveler doesn't need a pop prog in order to backspace. A smart netizen takes a turn to scan for the new location with his pop prog, then pops on the following turn. Popping blind (that is, without scanning first) raises the usual difficulty by +2. If both locations are located in the same sector, the Effect remains coincidental; if the traveler pops between sectors, the Effect is vulgar. (Again, see ***Magick in the Web***, below.)

A failed pop lands the traveler in some interesting form of hot water: the wrong place, a bad time, in the middle of nasty business, and so forth. A botched roll drops the visitor into some truly awful place or kicks him off the Web with a *soft de-rez*, as described under ***Digital Damage***, below.

If the traveler wants to pop in or out of a *Restricted* sector (an area with tight Constraint protocols), then the difficulty rises to 8 or 9, the Effect is vulgar, and a failed or botched roll instantly inflicts *icon death* or a *chaos dump* upon the traveler. Even if the player's roll succeeds, the character may get booted out anyway unless he's appropriately prepared to suit that sector's particular Constraints.

Magick in the Web

The full systems involved with Digital Web magick are too elaborate to detail here. Groups that want to explore the range of options can check out **Digital Web 2.0**, pps. 106-111. As rough guidelines, however, the Storyteller can assume that most forms of magick are coincidental, with the following exceptions:

- **Magick that comes from nowhere.** Being technological in origin, the Web demands technological origins from the so-called magick cast within its dimension. Mages who cast spells by will alone are essentially performing *vulgar magick without witnesses*. **(See Chapter Ten, p. 531-535)**, for details about the different kinds of circumstances.)

- **Spells cast inside a Restricted sector that come from outsiders to that area.** Netizens set up Restricted sectors to keep other people out. If and when undesirable visitors show up, the spells or Procedures they employ are automatically *vulgar with witnesses* because the folks who established that area set the local physics to reject trespassers. A Restricted area established by cyber-shamans, for example, would drop-kick a Black Suit's obvious Procedures. By the same token, a shaman dropping by to raise some hell in a Technocratic SRVR is in for a nasty surprise...

- **Effects that violate a sector's Constraint protocols.** Along the same lines, C-sectors are configured with reality physics that accept certain things while rejecting others. A sector built around medieval fantasy, for example, would render guns or jetpacks *vulgar with witnesses*, no matter who's trying to use them.

- **Any magick cast within the Corrupted web.** The localized physics are fucked, and so is anyone who tries to mess with reality there. Any and all Effects in such areas are considered *vulgar with witnesses*, so just don't even try.

- **Great Big Magicks™.** Large-scale spells throw around a lot of energy. And like a data-hog program on a computer, a massive expenditure of energy risks slowing or freezing the localized reality. For all its size, the Digital Web Zone is still just a few decades old. Unlike the Earth, which

has had eons to adjust its physics, the Web remains structurally unstable; radical power fluctuations disrupt its integrity, often leading to a Whiteout.

- **Forces or Prime Effects that score more than five successes.** For the same reason, Effects that generate a lot of power risk triggering a Whiteout. In this case, the spell itself may be rolled as if it were coincidental; if the player scores five successes or more, however, then each success rolled inflicts one Paradox point on the caster. (Six successes, then, would inflict six points of Paradox.) This rule, however, does not apply in Warzone sectors, which have been configured to handle massive surges of energy.

- **Effects or gates that jump between sectors or that attempt to bridge the Web with other areas of the Otherworlds.** With the exception of hot links – which have been specifically designed to pop folks back and forth between locations – an Effect that tries to open new passages from one sector to another, or from the Digital Web into some other Realm or Umbra, is considered *vulgar with witnesses*... the witness in question being the Web itself.

- **Effects that jump from Netspace to Meatspace**... because it's one thing to watch something morph onscreen, and another thing entirely to watch your computer turn into an asparagus.

Whiteout: The Paradox Glitch

Even a reality as flexible as the Digital Web has its limits... and when those limits get pushed by too much energy and information shifting around at once, the Web crashes. The resulting Whiteout can be as innocuous as a localized slowdown or as vast as the Great Crash that took the entire net offline in '97. Anyone with a lick of sense fears a replay of that particular incident, so folks online tend to avoid throwing their weight around too freely.

The Lag

Story-wise, Whiteouts de-rez the offending netizen. Large ones crash parts of a sector, and *really* large ones trash the area and everyone in it. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you can spot an impending Whiteout by the *lag*: a stuttering effect that slows and pixelates everyone in the surrounding area. Experienced netizens know to log out *immediately* when lag shows up. If a sector starts lagging, a Whiteout's on the way.

Rolling the Whiteout

In game terms, a Whiteout functions like any other Paradox backlash. For details, see the ***Paradox*** entry in **Chapter Ten**. The scale of a Whiteout, and its effects on the characters involved, can be found on the nearby ***Web Systems chart***. The associated effects and duration of the Whiteout depend upon the Paradox Pool of the person who provoked the backlash. The bigger his Pool, the longer the Whiteout.

A netizen can invoke the Whiteout when he accumulates five Paradox points or more, especially if he accumulates them all at once. The Storyteller usually rolls the dice for a backlash – one die per point in the Paradox Pool, rolled against a difficulty of 6. If the characters have been throwing around a lot of Forces or Prime magick, the difficulty may be 4 instead of 6. Fortunately, that option doesn't apply to Warzone sectors, which are set up to handle lots of force.

Thankfully, Paradox doesn't carry over between Earth and the Web unless the offending mage has climbed up into the Web from some other area of the Umbra. Going offline dumps a mage's net-based Paradox; he can return a minute or so afterward with no ill effects.

Getting Outta Dodge

A large-scale Whiteout – that is, one involving more than 10 points of Paradox – signals its approach with lag. Every character nearby, *except the one who provoked the backlash*, gets one action in which to ditch out and avoid the blast. In game terms, this involves a roll of Wits + Computer, difficulty 8. Success means that a character was able to drop offline in time to escape the Whiteout. Failure means that character gets hit with half damage as well, and a botch means the character takes full damage. If a bystander plans to stay online and ride out the backlash, then she takes half damage from the Whiteout. The person who triggered it, however, has no such options. He's stuck.

It's worth mentioning that folks who court Whiteout aren't terribly popular online.

Digital Damage

Despite the transhumanist ideal of leaving one's imperfect body behind, most netizens visit the Digital Web through projected minds, not physical forms. So what happens when they get hurt or die online? That depends...

Bashing, Lethal, and Aggravated Damage

In the Digital Web, combat follows the usual rules. Characters still use their Stamina to soak damage. Although the settings may be bizarre – adding to or reducing dice pools and difficulties – the physics play out in the usual way. The primary difference between them comes through in the damage suffered through such attacks.

For sensory or astrally immersed netizens, most injuries involve bashing damage. System shock (headaches, nervous twitches, fatigue, etc.) may affect the end user back home, but with a few exceptions, those injuries clear up quickly. Netizens refer to such injuries as *egg-frying*: your "egg" (head) gets a bit fried when you tangle with folks online.

Holistically immersed people, on the other hand, suffer damage as if Netspace were normal space. A punch inflicts bashing damage, and a gun deals out lethal damage. Because there's no icon to take the punishment, an HI visitor suffers the consequences. That's the primary reason folks still prefer astral visitation over full-on immersion.

Aggravated damage is, fortunately, rare. The only attacks that inflict such damage involve viruses, chaos dumps, Whiteouts, and feedback programs. Among netizens, agg damage manifests as burns, internal bleeding, brain hemorrhages, and the occasional exploding head. *Really* badly injured netizens tend to die offline, their icons sizzled and their bodies suffering aftershocks that leave their meat cooked or rotting in front of their computer gear.

Net Fatigue

Strenuous activity online leads to fatigue offline. Most netizens know all too well the headaches, backaches, joint pain, nightmares, fading vitality, and chronic obesity that plague people who spend most of their lives in front of computers. Game-wise, such effects are simply left to narration and roleplaying. Although a player might have to make a Willpower roll after some especially traumatic or exhausting experience (failure results in a nasty case of fatigue, neurosis, or Quiet), net fatigue is just part of life on the Digital Web. It's been said that the Web feeds on its human occupants, and net fatigue may be the end result.

Virus Infection

VR VD affects netizens the way herpes infects swingers: frequently, pervasively, and with annoying and sometimes serious results. One of the more infuriating forms of online virus involves the adware infection that causes netizens to suddenly talk like commercials at unexpected times. (Make a Willpower roll to resist the effects.) Although security software for an icon allows a netizen a soak roll against virus attacks, most netizens get infected at least once.

On a more ominous note, hackers, crackers, and security programs often pass off deadlier forms of virus. Such attacks can follow a traveler back into Meatspace, eroding his physical and mental abilities like a physical illness or poison. The ***Environmental Hazards*** section, earlier in this chapter, details the effects of various toxins. The Storyteller determines how nasty a particular virus will be.

Soft De-Rez

The most common fate for errant travelers, a soft de-rez instantly pops the traveler into some other part of the Web... typically a dump site or respawning ground. There, the icon and its user wind up stunned for several minutes, then get up and start over again.

In game terms, a soft de-rez is typically an automatic effect triggered when someone goes where she's not supposed to be or dies in a sector that's been dedicated to computer games so that death is not as dangerous as the more serious forms of icon destruction detailed below. The dump automatically inflicts one to three levels of bashing damage (no soak roll), depending on the severity of the attack.

For holistically immersed travelers, a soft de-rez inflicts between one to four levels of bashing damage but allows for a soak roll. The de-rezed character also suffers a penalty of +2 to all of her difficulties for an hour or two, thanks to the

Web Systems

Access

Sensory: VR gear; +1 to all difficulties; Intelligence = Strength, Wits = Dexterity; no physical presence in Web. No magick necessary.

Astral: VR gear; Correspondence 2; Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 7, three successes minimum; Intelligence = Strength, Wits = Dexterity; astral presence in Web. Coincidental magick.

Holistic: Trinary computer; Life 4/ Correspondence 2/ Forces 2; Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 7, five successes minimum; normal Traits, full physical presence in Web. Vulgar magick.

Icons

Basic Creation: Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 5. Three successes minimum.

Changing Icons: Manipulation + Computer, difficulty 5.

Appearance or Intimidation: One dot added per success.

Whiteout Severity

Successes	Effect
One	The mage responsible for the crash suffers a soft de-rez.
Two	The responsible mage suffers a hard de-rez.
Three	That mage and all icons with 20′ of him get booted to another sector (soft de-rez).
Four	Every icon within 50′ suffers a hard de-rez.
Five	Every icon in the sector gets a soft de-rez; the responsible party suffers a hard de-rez.
Six	All icons within the sector endure a hard de-rez. The sector itself fuzzes and goes offline, as per ***Duration***, below. The offender gets booted to a lost sector (Corrupted Web, Hung Sector, etc.).
Seven+	The entire sector crashes, goes offline for the duration, and suffers long-term damage. All icons within the sector get de-rezed hard; offender may be chaos dumped.
10+	Sector trashed forever. Everyone inside that sector suffers hard de-rez. Offender disappears.

Paradox Pool	Duration
1-3	Less than a minute.
4-6	One to five minutes.
7-10	One to six hours.
11-13	One day.
14-16	One week.
17-20	A month or more.
20+	Trashed forever

system shock of having her mind and body booted to another part of Netspace. If she happens to be in a Restricted sector when she gets de-rezed, then the character also loses one dot from a Mental Attribute for the same length of time, to reflect the mental fogginess that comes from getting slammed around the Web.

Hard De-Rez

Heavier attacks throw the visitor right offline. The icon gets blasted out of existence, and the user winds up back in his chair, head throbbing and senses boiled.

Story-wise, a hard de-rez strikes someone who violates a major protocol in a Restricted sector, crosses the wrong netizen, provokes a minor Whiteout backlash, or sustains enough damage to take him to Incapacitated while online. The effect boots him out of Netspace and leaves his physical body and consciousness scrambled and hurt.

In game terms, a hard de-rez inflicts two automatic health levels in lethal damage. A sensory or astral netizen gets a soak

roll against this damage (difficulty 7, not the usual 6) because of the distance between his icon and his physical form. A holistically immersed visitor does *not* get that roll, however, as his body takes the full effects of the dump.

In either case, the player must also make a Stamina roll, difficulty 7, or else lose two points from a Mental Attribute. These lost points heal like health levels lost to lethal damage and reflect the egg-frying intensity of a hard de-rez.

Icon Death

The fate of netizens who get cacked in sectors that haven't been designed to protect them from the consequences of mortality, *icon death* fries the icon and boots the traveler back into Meatspace. Story-wise, the icon explodes in a shower of screaming pyrotechnics or CGI gore while the person on the other end wakes up back in material reality, probably suffering minor burns and a major headache... and possibly suffering a lot worse than that.

(For the record, a holistically immersed traveler who gets killed in Netspace *dies*. That's that.)

From a rules perspective, icon death strikes a character whose icon falls below Incapacitated or who's caught in a major Whiteout backlash. The Storyteller calls for a Stamina roll, difficulty 7. If the player succeeds, the traveler gets knocked unconscious by the shock; waking up several minutes later, she'll be hallucinating her way through a crushing headache. Any injuries the icon took in Netspace manifest in Meatspace as bashing damage, although each success on the Stamina roll reduces that damage by one health level. The player can heal the remaining damage by spending one Willpower point per health level lost. Even then, however, the character remains haunted and scrambled for some time afterward; in game terms, she suffers a penalty of +3 to all difficulties for a day or two after the dump.

If that roll fails, the consequences become more severe. In this case, the damage is lethal and the character falls into a coma. A botched roll inflicts aggravated damage, frying the character in her chair; if by some miracle she survives, she's still in a coma and will suffer permanent impairment if she ever wakes up again.

A character who dies in a Restricted sector endures a profound mental breakdown. Even if the roll succeeds, that character loses two dots from each Mental Attribute, which heal back as if they were health levels of aggravated damage. If the Stamina roll fails, then that character undergoes...

The Chaos Dump

The dread of every netizen alive, a chaos dump blasts both the icon and its user's consciousness into fractals. The meat and the mind remain connected through the process, which results in an awful kind of Internet oblivion. An Arete roll (difficulty 8) sends the traveler's consciousness into an immediate Quiet, from which he may eventually escape. Success inflicts aggravated damage on the body as above. Failure or a botch on this roll cooks the mage from the inside out... the awful fate of many netizens on the day of the Great Whiteout. From that fate, no resurrection is possible.

Fortunately, chaos dumps are rare – typically the result of a huge Paradox backlash in the web. Among netizens, deliberately inflicting a chaos dump on someone is like using nerve gas on a crowded subway – the unforgivable act of someone too far gone for salvation. This is not to say, of course, that people *don't* do such things; those who do, however, are hated and hunted by almost everyone.

The Digital Web and the Avatar Storm

To the great relief of its netizens, the Digital Web appears to be immune from the effects of the Avatar Storm. Whereas other Otherworldly Realms have been scattered, cut off, or otherwise rendered unreachable by that Dimensional Anomaly, Netspace remains a haven for would-be world-builders and posthuman pioneers.

And if the Storm never happened? In that case, the Digital Web mirrors both the IT revolution and the Otherworldly aspirations of people who have neither the Arts nor the inclinations to take the more **ahem** Traditional path to the Worlds Beyond. Unlike the weird Three Worlds and the uncertain Horizon Realms, the Web reflects the dynamic fusion of imagination and technology – a living embodiment of new-millennial Ascension.

Part VII: The Otherworlds

Beyond this world, an adventurous mage can find infinite numbers more. Although these Otherworlds are rarely easy to find or explore – especially in the age of the Avatar Storm, which might or might not still make passage hazardous – a courageous traveler can unlock heavens, hells, dream worlds, and that ever-growing Digital Web.

Chapter Four goes into extensive details about these many layers, Realms, Zones, and so forth. Whether or not your **Mage** chronicle reaches into these Otherworlds depends upon the focus of the chronicle and the plans of your Storyteller. Although the earlier editions of **Mage** dealt extensively with Horizon Realms and off-planet excursions, the later books concentrated more on adventures in the material world. Either option works, and both of them feature a wide range of possibilities.

As detailed throughout **Chapter Four**, the various Otherworldly Realms have different paths of access. A mage can turn into spirit-stuff, project her consciousness into the Astral Reaches, experience a "little death" and pass into the Shadowlands, or step through a portal and into a distant Realm while sidestepping the distance (and possibly the Avatar Storm) entirely.

With or without an "avatar storm", the Otherworlds remain forbidding, unpredictable territory. Even their most familiar aspect – the Penumbra that reflects the spiritual nature of the human world – is changeable and strange, filled with eerie sights and vivid sensations. From a Storyteller's perspective, each excursion past the Gauntlet should be different – an invitation to the weirdest corners of your imagination. For all the rule systems presented below, the most vital rule regarding the Otherworlds is that there *are* no hard-and-fast rules about the Otherworlds. These guidelines merely lay a foundation for your own interpretation of What Lies Beyond.

Means of Access

Entering the Otherworlds involves stepping outside of everyday reality... or whatever passes for everyday reality to a mage... and literally entering a new state of being. With a few exceptions, a physical being does not enter the Umbra without undergoing some sort of transformation – projecting an astral self into the High Umbra, becoming spirit stuff for the Middle Umbra, and dying in order to become a sort of ghost for the Low Umbra. A physical person might step through a portal and enter a Horizon Realm, but to walk through the three Umbrae, a mortal has to become something *beyond* mortality.

Theoretically, a person retains her material form when she walks into the spirit world through a Shallowing. Thing is, as certain mages claim, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle may be at work in such situations: is that person still material because she *thinks* of herself as material, or is she transformed into spirit matter, simply *believing* she's still material while the rest of Creation views her as a spirit? Snarky folks refer to this as the *Schröndinger's mage theory*: a mental puzzle with no practical utility beyond its ability to provoke arguments. For all game-system purposes, the traveler remains material, though she can think of herself as whatever she wants to be.

Peeling the Onion

Unless it involves a direct portal into a Realm, every journey through the Otherworlds works like peeling an onion from the inside out. The traveler begins at the core (the material world), perceives the bigger picture (the Periphery), steps through first layer (the Gauntlet) and into the next layer (the Penumbra). From there, she travels outward, following omens and instincts into other layers (Realms), the skin of the onion (the Horizon), and freedom beyond that. If she ever makes it beyond the first Horizon, there's said to be another one waiting out there in the stars. The question as to whether that second true Horizon is the true skin of the onion or the skin of whoever's *peeling* that onion is a puzzle best left to philosophers.

The Periphery

As depicted in **Chapter Four**, the Periphery is less a place than a perception. The visitor perceives the deeper levels of existence through the *Vidare* – the perspective – that he expects to see. In game terms, this heightened perception involves either the ***Awareness*** Talent (described in **Chapter Six**), or the first dot in any Sphere (described in the ***Sphere entries*** of **Chapter Ten**). Essentially, these abilities reveal the shadows of the Otherworlds, although those perceptions don't actually involve travel as such into those realms.

After the Storm?

In the Reckoning metaplot, the Avatar Storm shook things up beyond the Gauntlet. Realms were displaced, transformed, and destroyed; paths between the worlds got switched, scrambled, and obliterated. Even the most familiar travelers found themselves lost in the Otherworlds. Although the decade and a half since those events might have settled things back to their old configurations (as detailed in **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds**), it might instead have established an entirely new order... or, more fittingly, a general *lack* of predictable order (as depicted in **The Infinite Tapestry**). If the Storm never happened, things may be very much as they had been back in the old days; then again, the Otherworlds are ephemeral, mysterious, and unbound by conventional excuses for human logic. Even without an Avatar Storm, the various Realms and pathways can change between visits... even change *during* visits. May the traveler beware!

The Gauntlet

Unless your characters step through a portal, discover a Shallowing, or are among the *very* few people who know how to find and employ the Paths of the Wyck, they'll need to pass through the Gauntlet – that metaphysical barrier that separates the physical and spiritual worlds. True, a perceptive person can sense the Periphery without stepping through the Gauntlet, getting feelings or catching glimpses of the Worlds Beyond. To actually *enter* those Worlds, however, your characters must penetrate the Gauntlet. And in our modern era, that ain't easy.

Rules-wise, you need to roll a certain number of successes in order to penetrate the Gauntlet by any method. Unless your mage's Arete is outrageously high, that also requires an extended roll. Time-wise, that roll reflects a certain period of time in which the character focuses on getting through the Gauntlet – anywhere from a few seconds to a minute or more per roll. (Storyteller's option, based upon circumstances.) Botching at any point while making those rolls has awful consequences; the mage gets stuck helplessly in between worlds, and needs another party with Gauntlet-crossing skills to push or pull him through to the other side. If the Avatar Storm's still in effect, then getting stuck can be excruciating and possibly fatal... (See the nearby sidebar, ***Optional Rules: The Avatar Storm***.)

Playing Out the Crossing

The game systems for crossing over and moving around can be found on the ***Traveling the Otherworlds charts***, (p. 484).

In story terms, this short journey involves some sort of ritual or process: focusing on a mirror, drumming and chanting, activating a trans-dimensional flux-capacitor, or whatever else suits the mage's practice and beliefs. While the character concentrates on passing through, the player rolls dice against the listed difficulty until the character phases through and winds up on the other side. Whether or not the character has to face the dreaded Avatar Storm is up to your Storyteller. Even without the Storm, however, the process can feel quite disconcerting.

The way a given character perceives his passage through the Gauntlet probably depends a bit upon the character and a lot upon the location and circumstances. An Akashic Brother meditating in a harmonious grove might feel a misty fog slide over him and then subside, leaving him in the Otherworlds. A dimension-hopping scientist could hear the turbines on her trans-dimensional flux-capacitor roar as a blinding light rises, fills the room, and explodes into a brilliant flash, shattering the dimensional wall. A High Ritual Magus could hear the music of the spheres as he cuts complex designs in the air with his thrice-consecrated blade; meanwhile, a desperate warrior in the combat zone cuts runes into the dirt, bathes them in her own blood, and prays to Odin or Sif as the distant blare of horns alerts her to the crumbling of that barrier between worlds. Both the player and the Storyteller should have fun describing the crossing of that Gauntlet. And given the odd nature of the Otherworlds, it might never happen the same way twice.

Whatever the method and location involved might be, a Gauntlet passage should reflect the ease or challenge of getting across. Penetrating the thick Gauntlet of a high-tech lab should feel different than sliding through the thin Gauntlet of a windswept mountain peak. From a Storyteller perspective, make that crossing as dramatic as possible... eerie, calming, terrifying, even sensual, depending on who's traveling where, how they're doing it, and under what sorts of circumstances they're traveling. Crossing the Gauntlet, ideally, should be more than just a series of dice rolls until you hit the target numbers. Even for people who spend lots of time in the Otherworlds, crossing between realities ought to be a memorable experience.

Stepping Sideways

The simplest way to travel to the Otherworlds, other than a portal, has traditionally involved stepping sideways. Whether or not that's *still* simple depends upon whether or not the Avatar Storm occurred. As we've seen elsewhere in this book, that **Revised**-era cataclysm is optional in your chronicle. Perhaps it happened in 1999 and is still going full force today. Maybe it happened but has since subsided, either to a lesser storm (see the sidebar) or to the relative calm of an earlier era. Your Storyteller could decide that it never happened at all and simply assume that stepping sideways is still as easy as it was in the mid-'90s. As any Umbral traveler can tell you, though, that trip was rarely as easy as it might appear...

Becoming Ephemera

To start with, a mage who steps sideways must use a Spirit 3 Effect to step sideways, employ Spirit 4 to open a gateway in the Gauntlet, or travel with someone else who opens that gateway for him. Certain powerful spirits can bring a mortal over to their side as well. Whichever way, the traveler becomes *ephemera*: the material of the spirit worlds. He might *feel* like flesh and blood, but he has become like the spirits around him.

In game terms, there's no change between matter and ephemera. The character still uses all of his Traits the same way on both sides of the Gauntlet. Once he's in the spirit world, however, that traveler cannot affect the physical world without using Spirit Sphere magick to reach the other side. He may, however, see and address spirits as if they were flesh and bone – something he can't do when he's in the material world. Even so, he needs at least two dots in the Spirit Sphere before he can actually *touch* them, and Life and Matter magick have no effect on spirits at all. (For details, see ***Part VIII: Umbral Spirit Entities***.)

When the traveler crosses back to the mortal world again, the process works in reverse; he becomes material flesh again. On both sides of that crossing, the experience can feel pretty weird – after all, the traveler's exchanging one kind of form for another. (See ***Disconnection***, below.)

Possessions

Traditionally, a person can step sideways carrying whatever they happen to be wearing at the time. Also traditionally, certain things just won't make that passage, or they malfunction if they arrive at all. High-tech materials and gadgets, sophisticated non-mechanical machines (like computers and so on), and

instruments that depend upon complex material physics to work (like guns or explosives) tend to be iffy, especially in the Middle Umbra's Spirit Wilds, where the principles of capital-N Nature take precedence over the vanities of men.

Wonders, however, work just fine. Any item with an effective Arete (see ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**) functions in the Umbra, although high-tech Devices might fail in certain specific areas of the Otherworlds that emphasize the essence of primal nature. Thus, a Technocrat's Alanson Hardsuit might function in places where an Uzi jams, but it could still fail – or entirely bar the Technocrat from entry – in places like the Hollow Earth.

Benefits and Limits

Stepping sideways involves getting your feet dirty, so to speak. Unlike the cleaner disembodied astral traveler, a mage who steps bodily through the Gauntlet becomes a part of the Otherworlds when he enters. As a result, he can visit the Middle-Umbra Spirit Wilds, where some sort of physical presence is essential... a feat astral travelers cannot match unless they spin a body out of Quintessence (see below). Sadly, stepping sideways is vulgar magick; the person fades away into nothingness, and that's clearly not a natural thing!

Beyond the effects noted above, a character who steps sideways is essentially himself. He cannot fly unless he uses magick to do so, walks to get wherever he's going, and can use whichever items he holds in his possession, assuming they still work where he goes. A traveler who employs astral travel, on the other hand, has some very different capabilities, both pro and con...

Astral Travel

For astral travel, a person enters a deep trance, meditates her consciousness outside of her body, and projects that astral self toward her destination. Normally, this requires Mind 4 or 5, although certain Night-Folk and talented Sleepers can do it too. As the physical body remains behind in a trance, the astral body flies off, attached to that body by the *umbilicus argentus*, or silver cord, that unites both body and consciousness.

An astral character can travel into the Periphery, journey through the High Umbra, or skim along through the material world if she chooses not to go into the Umbra at all. Because she's consciousness, not a physical body, the astral voyager can fly as well as walk. In either case, she cannot affect, or be affected, by physical beings – only by spirits or other astral entities (mummies, ghosts, astral travelers, etc.). For the cost of a Willpower point, she can manifest in the material world for one turn as a hazy vision of her idealized self. Even then, however, she can't interact with the material world except by using magick.

It's worth mentioning that technomancers, even Technocrats, can still employ astral travel. To them, it's not mystical – it's a *science*, a technology of the mind in which one's consciousness steps beyond this dimension and enters another one. Although such feats are beyond the reach of accepted Sleeper science (for now, at least), Enlightened scientists

understand that the mind transcends the body. Though the concept of a soul might seem absurd, the techniques of astral travel are perfectly acceptable to technicians of the mind.

Astral Traits

In game terms, a character who's traveling astrally uses her Mental and Social Traits as her Physical ones. Manipulation becomes Strength, Wits becomes Dexterity, and Intelligence becomes Stamina. Willpower takes the place of health levels, and so when an astral character suffers damage, she loses Willpower points instead of health. Intelligence can soak bashing and lethal damage but not aggravated damage, which attacks the mage on an essential level. If an astral character loses all of her Willpower, her silver cord snaps and she winds up disconnected from her physical body. Unless she can catch the cord and ride it back home soon, she'll be lost. (See ***Going Adrift***, below.)

Possessions

Normally, an astral traveler cannot bring material possessions along with her. The default astral form is naked, although the traveler can will imaginary clothing around herself by spending a Willpower point to do so. (That's not often a good idea, however; in astral travel, you'll want all the Willpower you can get!)

Certain objects can follow the astral form if they have been metaphysically bound to the mage by a ritual and a Prime 2 Effect. In that case, the player spends a Willpower point and then rolls her Arete, striving to get at least five successes. A successfully bonded object can travel into the astral realms as well, although if it depends upon complex physics to function (like a gun or computer), it probably won't work. Theoretically, it's impossible to do this with objects that have more mass than the mage herself. The existence of certain astral devices, however – like ghost trains and phantom cars – makes that theory rather debatable.

At the Storyteller's option, certain high-level Wonders – those with an effective Arete of 5 or higher – may have their own form of astral substance. In that case, a traveling mage might be able to take the Wonder with her. An allied spirit or familiar can accompany the astral traveler too, if the character has the appropriate Background Trait. (See **Chapter Six**.) Otherwise, an astral traveler is on her own.

The Astral Sojourn's Body of Light

Simple astral travel – the type you get from using Mind 4 alone – cannot push outside the High Umbra, Periphery, or material world. To go further, the traveler must employ the advanced **Astral Sojourn** ritual (Mind 4 or 5/ Spirit 3/ Prime 2).

This high-level act of magick allows a traveler to project her astral form into any layer of the "living" Otherworlds. Entering a deep and helpless trance, the mage weaves a metaphysical body of light for herself out of Prime energy, duplicating her Earthly body out of ephemera and Quintessential force. Once that body is completed, the traveler can use it to step sideways, carrying the traveler's consciousness with it.

In this case, the astral body has its usual Physical, Social, and Mental Attributes, as well as its usual health levels. If that body should lose all of its health levels, however, the body disintegrates and the consciousness finds herself adrift in the Umbra... not an especially pleasant fate.

The Silver Cord

The mystic *umbilicus argentus* that connects an astral traveler to her physical form is as strong as that traveler's Enlightened Will. To snap it, an attacker has to break the traveler's Will, either by reducing her to zero Willpower or by proving himself superior through raw metaphysical force.

Snapping a silver cord is difficult. In game terms, it requires Mind 5 and a direct psychic attack aimed at disconnecting body and mind. In a resisted roll, the attacker tries to roll more successes than the target, with the target's Willpower as the difficulty of both rolls. Obviously, a strong-willed person can break that connection more easily on a weaker-willed opponent than he could with an opponent whose Willpower is equal to, or greater than, his own.

A traveler whose astral cord gets snapped still has an astral form. By spending a Willpower point, she can grab onto that fleeting silver cord and ride it back to her physical body. Otherwise, she winds up disconnected... and adrift.

Going Adrift, Astral Beacons, and Spirit Allies

An astral traveler who dies has a short time to find her way back to her body before the consciousness drifts and the body decays. In game terms, she has up to one week for each point in her permanent Willpower; after that, her consciousness dissipates into the High Umbra and is essentially gone forever.

To find her way back to her body, the player for that drifting mage must make a successful Wits + Occult roll, difficulty 9. Each roll reflects six hours of time spent searching. Various obstacles – Umbrood jailers, astral storms, and so forth – can interfere with this search, although because the consciousness has no body left to attack, she's essentially drifting around the Otherworlds.

To attract the attention of a drifting traveler, an ally back in the material world can set up an **Astral Beacon** spell in order to draw her back toward her body. Game-wise, this requires a Mind 2/ Prime 2 Effect. The Beacon lasts one day per success, and it gives the lost traveler the ability to roll Perception + Occult (or Wits + Meditation, Perception + Meditation, or Wits + Occult, whichever is best) to find her way home. That roll's difficulty is 9, minus the successes rolled by the ally; an ally's roll of four successes, for instance, would give the traveler's roll a difficulty of 5.

If the traveler has the ***Totem*** or ***Familiar*** Background, then that entity can try to lead her home. In this case, the traveler rolls Perception + the appropriate Background Trait, with a difficulty of 9 minus the Background's rating (Totem 3, for instance, would make the difficulty 6). In all cases, the journey of a lost astral soul back to her physical body should involve vivid narration and roleplaying that deal with the cosmic side of **Mage** and an Awakened person's identity. (See ***Seekings***, **Chapter Seven**.)

A drifting soul with sufficient magick can try to possess a different body. In this case, the traveler needs to use a Mind 4 Effect and overcome the target's Willpower. (See the ***Mind Sphere***

description in **Chapter Ten**.) If that body lives on the other side of the Gauntlet from the drifting traveler, then she'll need to be able to see him (Spirit 2) before she'll be able to possess his form.

The Meat

Unless she uses Correspondence 2 to retain connection to the meat back home, an astrally projected traveler cannot sense the body she has left behind. Hopefully, she's stashed it in a safe, secure location, protected by allies, wards, locked doors, and so forth. While the traveler's away, the physical body remains vulnerable to pretty much everything. It continues to live in a biological sense but is effectively brain dead. If the astral consciousness gets lost, the body remains in a coma... and, unless there's someone around to take care of it, eventually dies of thirst. **(For rules, see *Starvation and Thirst* in the *Environmental Hazards* section, pp. 435-436).**

Benefits and Limits

In many respects, astral travel remains an ideal method of exploration. Immune to the Avatar Storm, that astral self can fly from the physical world to the Penumbra, the Vulgate, and the High Astral Realms. A sufficiently skilled traveler (Mind 5) can even leap beyond the Horizon and venture into the Deep Umbra. Astral travel provides the natural way of entering the Maya and the primary method of entering the Digital Web. Unlike stepping sideways, astral travel is usually coincidental, too. Unless the traveler crafts a body of light, the only thing a witness would see is the traveler meditating in a deep trance. Still, such journeys have inherent hazards and limitations.

The hazards have been outlined above. As far as limits go, an astral traveler cannot explore the Middle Umbra beyond the Penumbra layer unless she employs the Astral Sojourn method and creates a body for herself from Quintessence. She can't go into the Low Umbra at all unless she has, in a sense, died. And although she may pass through a portal and enter a Horizon Realm in astral form, she's confined to the usual limits she would have in the material world.

On a meta level, astral travel breaks the connection of that person as a united self. The mind and body clearly become separate entities during astral flight, and that fact can mess with the traveler's head when she comes back to herself in the material world. In some regards, this cultivates the ideal of unattachment that certain mages and philosophers prize; on the other hand, it can leave a person feeling disassociated and remote. Having disconnected her body and her mind (possibly her soul as well) from one another, that traveler may face existential questions that have no easy answers, in this world or any other.

The Agama Sojourn

And then there's the place you have to be literally dying to get into. As mentioned elsewhere, a traveler to the Low Umbra must be dying or dead in some fashion in order to enter the Shadowlands. Even then, depending on the metaphysical situation, there might not be much to see there at all. Although it's likely that the Shadowlands have been rebuilt over the last 13 years even if there *had* been a titanic Maelstrom, living mages might still be forbidden from entering the Dead Realms these days. Given the business with that spirit-nuke, it would certainly make sense to have the living barred.

Living Death

A mage employing the **Agama Sojourn** ritual (assuming it still works) must pass through the Gauntlet using a combination of Entropy 4/ Spirit 3/ Life 2 for her own passage – the *Agama Re* rite – or Entropy 4/ Spirit 4/ Life 3 in order to send someone else through and keep them tethered to the living world enough to return – the *Agama Te* rite. Considering that the Sojourn is a time-honored method of initiating Chakravanti mages (and, under other names, initiates from several shamanic cultural traditions as well), we recommend that Storytellers still allow the short, sacred initiatory experience to exist even if longer trips are no longer possible.

An Agama Sojourn essentially divides the mage's soul between the worlds of the living and the dead, keeping her body just alive enough for a return trip to material reality. Although there's no silver cord connecting the two aspects of the traveler's being (as there is in astral travel), the journeying character simultaneously becomes ghostly ephemera in the Shadowlands and a clinically dead (though not *fully* dead) body in the material world. As mentioned in **Chapter Four**, it's an extremely perilous trip, one many travelers can't return from. That edge of danger remains a vital part of the Sojourn's importance. If it was *easy*, after all, then it wouldn't be the transformative event that it is.

Agama Traits

That spiritual body – often referred to as the *corpus* – has 10 health levels and sometimes manifests features from the mage's Avatar as well as her physical self. Thus, a Sojourning mage might appear as a combination of her familiar physical person and her metaphysical Awakened Self... which can be a rather revealing and enlightening, if terrifying, experience.

Life Sphere magick means nothing to a corpus, as the traveler's life remains behind in her physical form. If she suffers damage in that form, then, only Spirit 3 magick can heal it. True ghosts can sense that traveler's spark of life with a Perception + Awareness roll (or, for Umbrood spirit beings, a Gnosis roll), difficulty 6. That spark makes the traveler extremely attractive for all the wrong reasons. Certain ghosts will want to strike bargains with the traveler, some will try to eat or corrupt her spirit, and some will try to destroy her simply for being what they can never be again: *alive*.

Unlike living things, a ghost or corpus suffers no wound penalties; after all, she's got no physical body, and thus cannot be physically crippled. A traveler who loses all of her corpus health levels, however, reaps two awful consequences: a permanent point of ***Jhor*** **(death Resonance – see Chapter Ten, pp. 560-561)**, and a trip into a *Harrowing*.

The Harrowing

Essentially an Underworld Seeking, a Harrowing brings up the traveler's worst fears and then forces her through a maze of horrors drawn from her own psyche. Split into a helpless Avatar-self (robbed of most, if not all, of its most powerful features) and a naked victim self, the traveler confronts the embodiments of her innermost

Optional Rules: The Avatar Storm

As revealed in previous chapters, metaphysical concussions from 1999 turn the passage between worlds into a danger zone for mages. The shredded Avatars of dead souls rip through the Patterns of human travelers. Although spirits and shapechanging monsters can apparently pass through the Gauntlet without trouble, mages who step sideways suffer devastating harm... and the more powerful the mage, the more severe that harm can be!

Does the Avatar Storm still exist, has it since subsided, or did it ever happen to begin with? That's your call. If you choose to keep the Storm in force, however, the following optional rules apply:

- **Shredding Winds:** When a mage steps sideways into the Umbra, ferocious winds scour his Avatar with the screaming fragments of lost souls. Even if he merely reaches into the Umbra, this effect still applies. The player rolls his permanent Paradox + Arete against difficulty 6; each success inflicts one health level in aggravated damage as the howling gales tatter his ephemeral form and rip gashes in his soul.

  If your Storyteller decides that the Avatar Storm is receding but has not yet completely dissipated, that damage may be lethal or bashing instead. In either case, that damage is automatic unless the traveler has somehow insulated himself from its effects.

- **Bodily Protection:** Magickal, and perhaps mundane, methods of protection from aggravated damage might help a traveler soak the damage from the Avatar Storm. Life Sphere magick, technomagickally enhanced armor, protection conferred by Wonders, and so forth can all add to a character's soak roll. Because the damage is *meta*physical, however, it's a Storyteller's call as to whether or not *normal* armor will protect someone. Can Kevlar deflect raging soul-shards, or will they go straight through it? The answer depends on each Storyteller's judgment.

- **Gauntlet Spell Damage:** A mage who tries to set a spell inside the Gauntlet – like a Spirit 4 ward – can still take damage from the Storm, as described above. An Effect that has been designed to penetrate the Gauntlet (like a Mind-based message) gets distorted while passing through the Storm; the Storyteller rolls the usual Shredding Winds damage dice based on the caster's Arete, and each success removes one success from the caster's original roll. (A three-success Mind message, for example, that takes two levels of damage going through the Storm would have only one success left and would thus wind up distorted from its original intentions.)

  Low-level Spirit Sphere Effects, like the ones that allow mages to see or contact spirits, remain immune to Storm damage or distortion, although mages who step sideways into the Umbra to use them suffer damage as usual. Also, Effects that travel only a short distance – say, a bolt of lightning cast from the physical world into the Umbra – arrive more or less intact; long-distance Effects, however, may be badly warped or often lost completely.

- **Wonder Damage:** Enchanted Wonder items take damage as well. In this case, roll the Arete of the object crossing the Gauntlet and apply damage as above. If that object takes more than double the object's Arete, that Wonder gets destroyed by the Storm. A spirit bound into a Fetish might escape both the Storm and the Fetish unharmed... but if that spirit had been bound into the fetish unwillingly, the mage might have a whole *new* problem on his hands...

  For details about ***Wonders***, see the Background of that name in **Chapter Six** and ***The Toybox*** in **Appendix II**.

- **Spiritual Immunities:** Spirit entities, shapechanging Night-Folk, and unAwakened sorcerers remain unaffected by the Avatar Storm. Although passing through it hurts a bit – like an exceedingly hot or icy shower – such beings do not take damage from it the way that Awakened mages do.

- **Astral Immunity:** Travelers who employ Mind 4 or 5 to project their astral consciousness may bypass the Avatar Storm. This method, however, can access only the High Umbra – not Horizon Realms or the Middle and Low levels. Such travelers also have a silver cord connecting them to their Earthly bodies; if that cord gets damaged, the traveler is probably lost. (See the ***Astral Travel*** entry for details.)

- **Paths of the Wyck:** For the few people who can find and navigate them, the Paths of the Wyck remain free from the Avatar Storm's effects. Those who stray from those Paths, however, may find themselves in the middle of the Storm... or worse, somewhere beyond the understanding of even the wisest of Verbena!

- **Shield of the Soul:** Mages with the ***Familiar*** or ***Totem*** Backgrounds may ask their companion spirits for a favor... the favor of taking them across the Storm without harm. In this case, the mage creates what's called the **Shield of the Soul** (a Prime 3/ Spirit 2 spell) between herself and her allied spirit. Successfully cast, this Shield disguises the mage's spirit within the mantle of her spirit friend. With that Shield in place, the mage suffers damage only from her Paradox Trait, not from her Arete. Naturally, the spirit in question must be favorably disposed toward the mage on both ends of that journey; if not, the results could be rather painful.

- **Bridging With Blood:** Speaking of painful, the abhorred **Bridge of Blood** ceremony (Spirit 4/ Prime 3) forces a spirit to serve as protection. Offering up that spirit as a sacrifice, the mage essentially fakes out the Avatar Storm by filling the spirit with her own Quintessence and then using it as a decoy while stepping sideways. System-wise, this requires a roll of at least one success for each point in the mage's Avatar Background rating and puts all that mage's Quintessence into the spirit before pulling it through the Gauntlet as a light snack for the Avatar Storm. Such behavior is considered *extremely* bad form and may put the spellcaster on the shit list for other mages as well as spirits allied with the unfortunate entity.

Optional Rules: The Avatar Storm (Continued)

- **Stormwarden:** A rare but precious birthright, the ***Stormwarden*** Merit – described in **Appendix II** – reflects a total immunity to the Avatar Storm's effects. See that entry for details.
- **Peeling of the Soul:** A botched roll while a mage steps sideways through the Gauntlet locks that mage in place – half in the material world, half in the raging Avatar Storm. That traveler remains stuck until some other party pulls him through to one side or the other. Each turn that he remains in this netherspace after the initial botch, the winds peel one point of Avatar away from his Avatar Background Trait. If he loses every point in his Avatar Background, plus one, then he's effectively Gilguled until and unless he finds a way to heal his spirit. The mage might be able to undergo a Seeking to retrieve the missing bits of his soul, but until then, he remains spiritually crippled from the Storm.
- **Quiet:** A mage who takes more than four health levels in damage from the Avatar Storm might have to make a Willpower roll or fall into a Quiet from the trauma. That roll's difficulty would be 3 + the amount of damage the mage suffered from the Storm. If he drops to Incapacitated, the Quiet is automatic – a refuge from the horrific torment of his soul. For details, see ***Quiet*** in **Chapter Ten (pp. 554-561)**.

Roving Storms

Even if the worst of the Avatar Storm has passed into troubled memory, occasional Roving Storms roll through the Realms at various inconvenient times. In such moments, a roiling cloud of shrieking voices and tortured faces appears in the distance, flowing across the landscape and rearranging things into chaotic and often terrifying forms. For obvious reasons, anyone and everyone nearby should run for cover or suffer the consequences.

The full effects of getting caught out in a Roving Storm are left to the Storyteller's twisted imagination, but they should include the usual type of damage (perhaps lowered to lethal damage, for survivability's sake), the potential for Quiet, and the certain annihilation of familiar landmarks in the Realm. An awful embodiment of metaphysical decay, the Avatar Storm – in all of its guises – upends expectations and tears predictability apart.

nightmares, comprised of a tormentor self that comes from the mage's repressed elements. Everything she fears, hates, or tries not to recognize about herself becomes part of the Harrowing. Through the course of this timeless torture, she's driven away from Ascension and towards despair. Unless she drags up the most determined and yet compassionate aspects of herself, that nightmare may consume her.

System-wise, a Harrowing becomes a Seeking of the most intense kind that your troupe and boundaries allow. (See ***Seekings*** and ***Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries***, both in **Chapter Seven**.) Even if only one mage character's involved, other players might take the roles of spectral tormentors in that ordeal. If the character can hold true to her vision of integrity and Ascension, then both the Harrowing and the Agama Sojourn end with the traveler back in her living body. If she falters or fails, the player should roll Willpower, difficulty 9. A successful roll brings her back to her body in a state of deep panic or despair, whereas failure brings her back with one fewer point of Arete (after all, she failed an important test), an additional point of Jhor, and possibly other lingering effects of that ordeal. (See ***Flaws*** in **Appendix II**.) A botched roll at this point turns the character into an Oblivion-consumed monster – a Nephandus, possibly, or a demon-ghost spectre. Such a fate, however, should be inflicted only on a character whose soul is already in doubt and whose player seems ready to handle either losing her mage or playing out the corruption. One bad die roll should not annihilate a character.

Possessions

A mage on an Agama Sojourn brings nothing with her. Whether or not this includes clothing is a Storyteller call, although ghosts *do* tend to manifest wearing either the clothes they died in or else some other significant garb, like a wedding dress or military uniform. In any case, those clothes are projections of the person's self-image, not material items. They don't have useful things in the pockets unless those items have been imbued with Entropic energies from an Entropy 3 Effect and then bound to the mage with a Prime 2 ritual as in the ***Astral Travel*** entry, above.

Agama Travel Beyond the Underworld

Although few mages can accomplish this feat, it *is* possible for an Agama voyager to move from the Low Umbra to the other layers. Doing so requires either powerful magick (Entropy 5/ Spirit 5, plus the usual Agama requirements) that can open a gateway between the Shadowlands and the Middle Umbra, or a high-end astral projection (Entropy 5/ Mind 5, plus the usual Agama requirements) that can take the dead consciousness up out of the Shadowlands and raise it into the Vulgate region of the High Umbra.

Note that *only* an Agama Sojourn voyager can cross between the Low Umbra and other layers. A Middle Umbra traveler or High Umbra astral visitor *cannot* cross down into the realms of death unless he is already deceased. The only possible exceptions involve Shallowings, portals, and the World Tree, all of which – according to legend – can take a living person to the Realms of the Dead.

Benefits and Limits

Self-recognition and a deepened understanding of morality are perhaps the greatest benefits of an Agama Sojourn. It's a

risky, morbid trip that leaves a part of the Shadowlands lodged within the traveler's psyche. Since the Avatar Storm, that journey has also forced travelers to face the very real prospect of a permanent death. Unlike an astral traveler, a visitor to the Low Umbra has no protection from the Storm's lashing winds. In fact, that Storm, if it still rages, may reach its most chilling aspects in the realm where it originated. The Underworld also imposes certain limits upon visiting mages and their Arts. For details, see ***Magick in the Otherworlds***, below.

Even for successful voyagers, a trip to the Low Umbra is an ugly look at cosmic fatalism. With or without the Storm, a Harrowing, or other screaming horrors, such trips mark a traveler in ways she cannot truly comprehend until she has faced them and returned.

Travel Between Layers

Portals, moon bridges, and other passageways allow a traveler to move from one place to another within the Otherworlds. Human travelers usually need spirit allies to open up moon bridge routes – such paths are not intended for human feet, especially not in the modern era.

If a voyager wishes to cross from the High Umbra into the Middle Umbra without a portal or bridge, then he'll need to either return to the Penumbra, climb the Pattern Webs, or else find and scale the World Tree (or Mount Qaf) that supposedly rises and descends between every layer of the universe.

In any case, a traveler to the High Umbra may rise only as far as the Courts and Afterworlds unless he has taken astral form. A character who has stepped sideways or who's risen up from the Underworld cannot ascend to the Spires or Ephiphamies except through astral projection or the embodied Astral Sojourn form.

Climbing From World to World

Scaling the World Tree or Pattern Webs is a rigorous, risky feat. Such a journey should be an adventure in itself, with various spirit critters (Pattern Spiders, titanic insect spirits, giant creatures, Bane spirits, etc.) interfering with the climb. Rules-wise, that feat should involve many Dexterity + Athletics and Perception + Cosmology rolls, with horrible penalties for failing or botching a roll – nightmarish falls, detours into other Realms, cosmic vertigo, and so forth.

According to legend, the Paths of the Wyck and the "backstage at the universe" corridors also lead to pretty much everywhere within Earthly reach. The truth behind that contention... and the truth behind the rumor that these two passageways are the same thing after all... is left for the Storyteller to decide.

Midrealm, the World Tree, and Mount Qaf

Chapter Four describes the legendary ***Midrealm***, from which the Alder Bole, or World Tree, rises and spreads between all of the Three Worlds. Certain accounts also liken this Tree to ***Mount Qaf***, the center of the universe, although Mount Qaf also supposedly resides within the Digital Web. (Damn conflicting metaphysics...) According to legends, a person can supposedly scale the World Tree and/ or Mount Qaf. In order to *climb* them, however, mages first have to *find* them.

An intrinsically primal Realm to begin with, Midrealm might remain completely hidden from all but the most primal of travelers: shapechangers, shamans, witches, ascetic monks, religious primitivists, and other mortals whose ties to Nature remain untarnished by modern technology. In game terms, locating Midrealm requires an adventure, possibly begun with several Perception + Enigmas or Perception + Empathy rolls as the travelers read the vibe of their surroundings. *IF* (*big* if) those travelers manage to find the rainbow and step beyond its brightly colored borders, they might be able to climb the Tree (or, if it appears as Mount Qaf, the mountain) into other Realms and layers of the Umbra. Even then, however, they'll be able to rise only as high as the Courts or sink only as low as the Shadowlands. The Tree might reach higher and lower than that, but mortals remain limited by their own innately flawed nature.

Finding Your Way

All layers of the Otherworlds defy normal geography. Their paths and landmarks shift in unpredictable ways, and traveling is more a matter of *instinct* than of *memory*.

In game terms, an Otherworldly traveler uses the following dice pools if he tries to navigate his way around these puzzling Umbrascapes:

- **The Penumbra:** As per travel in the material world.
- **The High Umbra:** Intelligence + Cosmology in most areas, Intelligence + Enigmas in the Ephiphamies. A traveler *thinks* her way through the High Umbra.
- **The Middle Umbra:** Perception + Cosmology in the Spirit Wilds, Wits + Enigmas within the Realms. A traveler *feels* her way through the Middle Umbra.
- **The Low Umbra:** Wits + Enigmas or Occult. A traveler *puzzles* her way through the Low Umbra.
- **Most Realms:** Mental Attribute + Cosmology or Enigmas... or, in wilderness Realms, Mental Attribute + Survival.
- **Old Roads/ the Paths of the Wyck:** Perception + Survival, plus at least two dots in Cosmology, Enigmas, or both, and the proper background (that is, intense witch or shamanic training) to understand those Paths at all.

(These methods of navigation differ somewhat from those presented in **The Infinite Tapestry** and **The Book of Worlds**. If you prefer, use the older systems instead.)

For other routes and methods of travel, see **Chapter Four** and the ***Digital Web*** section above.

Optional Rule: Verbenae and the Old Roads

The Verbena Tradition was formed, in large part, because of the Paths of the Wyck. That group's founders, Nightshade and

William Groth, used those Old Roads to travel to unknown lands and bring back mages from distant regions. As a result, the Council of Nine was born, and so those Paths are considered a sacred inheritance to that Pagan Tradition. Trusted members (that is, people who have spent several years in the group and whose deeds have graduated them beyond initiate status) are told the secrets of the Path, which they swear to protect with their lives.

Thanks to the secrets handed down to them through the Tradition and its teachings, Verbena characters – and *only* those characters who have been trained by, and who've earned the trust of, the Verbena Tradition – may use Correspondence 1 in order to locate an entrance to the Old Roads near a Node. A successful Arete roll, used as part of a search for that entrance, can locate a Path if one exists in that area. The difficulty of the roll, in this case, is the local Gauntlet rating, not the difficulty of a coincidental Rank 1 Effect. It's harder to find entrances in high-tech places, assuming that such entrances exist there at all.

In many areas, even around Nodes, there *are* no entrances to find. The Paths are elusive, especially in this age of diminished mysticism and technological dominance. Other Paths lead nowhere – a few yards, perhaps, before dead-ending in a tangle of thorns, a stone wall, or a cliff. It's the Storyteller's call as to whether or not the Old Roads found by a given character lead anywhere useful. Still, a very successful roll – one with three successes or more – should yield a Path of some significance.

As mentioned in **Chapter Four** (p. 86), the Old Roads can be found in, and can lead to, urban areas as well as wilderness. That said, they tend to favor primal nature over technological constructs. On many levels, it's as if such Paths are living things that don't want to be found except by their ancient caretakers, so again, this *optional rule* applies only to Verbena witches who have bound themselves to that ancient role and who can be trusted to protect those Old Roads from would-be trespassers.

Acclimation

In another *optional rule* rooted in the Reckoning metaplot, mages who spend time in the Otherworlds have to readjust, or *Acclimate*, to the material world after being away from it for a time. Until the traveler reorients himself to Earthly reality, he feels disconnected and awkward, as if he were balancing between two worlds but not fully part of either of them.

In game terms, a traveler without either the ***Shapechanger Kin*** or ***Umbral Affinity*** Merits suffers penalties to his rolls when he returns to Earth. Longer trips inflict higher penalties and greater recovery times, as shown on the ***Acclimation Periods chart***. Full details about ***Umbral Affinity*** can be found in **Appendix II**.

Before the Avatar Storm appeared, acclimation wasn't really an issue. Even if the Reckoning metaplot doesn't come into play, however, the Storyteller may

Acclimation Periods

Journey	Penalties
Up to One Week	None except for mild disorientation.
Two to Three Weeks	+1 to difficulties for physical tasks; lasts one or two days.
Four to Five Weeks	+1 to physical difficulties and +1 to the difficulty of all Pattern magicks (Forces, Life, and Matter Spheres) for one or two days.
Six to Seven Weeks	+2 to physical difficulties for two days, lessening to +1 for a week afterward; +1 to the difficulties of all Pattern magicks for three days.
Eight to Nine Weeks	+2 to physical difficulties for four days, lessening to +1 for a week afterward; +1 to Pattern magick difficulties for a week.
10 Weeks+	+3 to physical task difficulties for four days, +2 for an additional week, and +1 for an additional week after that; +2 to all Pattern magick difficulties for three days, then +1 to those difficulties for an additional week.

impose a +1 penalty upon Earth-bound physical actions for several days after a long trip in the Otherworlds. Our world can be emotionally and physically disorienting when you've been somewhere else – physically, as on an extended wilderness hike; mentally, like being immersed in a long session of a roleplaying game; or spiritually, journeying through the Otherworlds – for a while.

Disconnection and Disembodiment

Unless they have shapechanger blood, human beings hold only tenuous ties to the Otherworlds. Over time, their ties to the material world begin to fade. A traveler who does not return home within a given period of time will grow increasingly disconnected from Earth, gradually becoming spirit-stuff. Once it happens, that's a one-way trip. Many spirit entities supposedly began their existence as human beings who lost touch with their former lives and became roving Umbral denizens. **(See *Disembodiment and Void Adaptation* in Chapter Four, p. 88-89.)**

How long does that take? That depends on the travelers and the metaplot. In the days before the Avatar Storm, the average person could spend between one and four months in the Otherworlds, depending on their ties to the mortal world and the nature of their travels. Exceptionally primal mages, however, could wander the Spirit Wilds for up to a year without losing their ties to the material world.

In the Avatar Storm metaplot, the upheaval between worlds cuts this time shorter. If you use that metaplot element in your chronicle, then a traveler can spend up to three cycles of the moon (three months) in the Otherworlds. After that, he loses touch with his old home and joins the Umbrood hosts, possibly becoming a strange phantom of his former self. If the Avatar Storm did not happen, or if its effects have faded since that time, then the old rules for disconnection apply.

Horizon Realms and the Reckoning

In Horizon Realms, this spiritual disconnection has been suspended. A person can live for years in a Horizon Realm and then return to the material world... a bit unsteady, perhaps, but still human. (See ***Acclimation Periods,*** above..)

In the Reckoning metaplot, however, the Avatar Storm severs ties between most of the Horizon Realms and Constructs outside material reality. Sealed off from their old world, the people in those Realms became disembodied spirits – still conscious, but no longer human, and exiled from the mortal world by the Avatar Storm. Presumably, their weird blend of Awakened mortality and Disembodied spirit essence leaves them vulnerable to the Storm, which does not normally affect spirit beings. In any case, these people have been lost. Now they populate the Ghost Realms, literally shades of their former selves.

Again, the truth behind the situation depends on your individual chronicle. Perhaps the Storm did come, *did* sever Realms from Earth, and their residents *did* wind up as spirit beings. Or maybe not – perhaps Horizon is still whole and the old Masters are still fully human. Maybe it happened and those people are lost, but new Realms have been built since then. Ultimately, the only way to know for sure is to find out for yourself.

Magick in the Otherworlds

Mages being mages, your characters will want – and often *need* – to use magick in the Otherworlds. Such Arts can vary wildly in their effects, depending on where the characters are, who's doing what, and how they're doing it. The specific rules for certain locations are too involved to feature in **Mage 20**, and can be found in the sourcebooks **The Infinite Tapestry** and **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds**. As simple guidelines for such situations, however, a Storyteller can use the following rules:

Unfamiliar Ground

Being accustomed to the material world, most mortal visitors suffer a +1 difficulty penalty to their attacks in the Umbra. Characters with the ***Umbral Affinity*** Merit doesn't suffer this penalty, nor do characters who've spent a few days

Traveling the Otherworlds

Gauntlet Ratings

Area	Difficulty [#1]	Successes Needed
Node	3	One
Deep Wilderness	5	Two
Rural Countryside	6	Three
Most Urban Areas	7	Four
Downtown	8	Five
Technocracy Lab [#2]	9	Five

Notes

An area's Gauntlet Difficulty may vary with time and circumstances; a dark alley on Halloween night might have a Gauntlet of 6, while a rigidly cultivated garden at noon could have a Gauntlet of 8.

#1 = If using the Technocratic victory metaplot, add +1 to the Gauntlet Rating when in industrial culture zones, whether or not the Avatar Storm is still in force.

#2 = Treat as a Node when using Dimensional Science.

Methods of Travel and Navigation

Method	Spheres
Stepping Sideways	Spirit 3 or 4
Astral Projection	Mind 4 or Mind 5
Astral Sojourn	Mind Mind 4 or 5/ Spirit 3/ Prime 2
Agama Re	Entropy 4/ Life 2/ Spirit 3
Agama Te	Entropy 4/ Life 3/ Spirit 4
Astral Agama	Entropy 5/ Mind 5/ Spirit 3
Climbing	Dexterity + Athletics
Region	Dice Pool to Navigate
High Umbra	Intelligence + Cosmology (or Enigmas)
Middle Umbra	Perception + Cosmology (or Survival)
Lower Umbra	Wits + Enigmas (or Occult)
Old Roads	Perception + Enigmas (or Survival)
World Tree	Perception + Cosmology

in (or have made several voyages to) the Otherworlds. By that point, they're acclimated to the weird rules of the Umbra and its Realms.

The Shining Ones

Mages in the Otherworlds tend to reflect the nature of their magick, often shining or shadowed with the radiance of their Truest Self. In the Otherworlds – particularly along the passages between Realms, out beyond the Penumbra – a traveler looks like an exaggerated, idealized, version of the person that, for better and worse, she *is*.

Echoes of Resonance manifest more obviously in the Umbrae, too. A vibrant and generous Hermetic magus may glow with cheerful light, making plants thrive simply by walking past; a dour priest, on the other hand, may slouch over his exaggerated crucifix, a perpetual scowl etched across his stony face.

Powerful mages radiate the aura of their strongest Spheres too, and almost everyone displays at least a hint of their affinity Sphere. A Forces-dedicated witch may crackle with electricity, while a Time-focused cyborg seems to flicker in place or move with clockwork precision. Such manifestations come through in roleplaying, narration, and general description, without hard-and-fast rules deciding their effects. In many cases, though, it's easy to tell a lot about a traveler simply by looking at him. Unless that traveler makes an effort to conceal his true nature with magick, a successful Perception + Awareness roll will almost certainly reveal interesting details about who he is and what he does.

Coincidental Magick

As a general rule, all forms of mystic magick are coincidental in the Umbra as a whole. Certain Realms, however, may be more or less attuned to certain paradigms, accepting one type of magick as coincidental (say, High Ritual Magick) while rejecting others (like weird science or martial arts) as vulgar.

In the High Umbra, technomagick tends to be as coincidental as mystic magick is. Science and technology, after all, are products of rarefied thought. In the Middle Umbra's Spirit Wilds, on the other hand, technomagick is often vulgar, and fails completely in the Aetherian Reaches. Again, certain Realms flip that around, recognizing technomagick (or at least certain forms of it, anyway) as coincidental while rejecting mystic practices as vulgar.

As for the Low Umbra, techomagick tends to be vulgar there, while primal, ritual, and sacred magick is coincidental. Perhaps the disastrous effects of the spirit nuke added a spectacular Paradox Effect on top of the usual conflagration...

The Spheres

Certain Spheres work better or worse in the Otherworlds than they do in the material world. Although the following guidelines may not apply in various Realms, they hold true for most of the Umbra at large:

- Prime and Mind Sphere Effects work normally, perhaps even at a -1 difficulty in certain situations.

- Time and Forces suffer a +1 difficulty to their associated Arete rolls.
- Life and Matter don't work on Umbral creatures or objects unless those targets originated in the material world. Life would work on a Black Suit, for example, but not on a stag spirit.
- Spirit makes the user shine like a beacon, and acts like Life against creatures and Matter on objects. As noted elsewhere, a mage needs at least two dots in the Spirit Sphere before she can physically touch a spirit being; otherwise, her hand just slides right through its ephemeral form, even though she's ephemeral as well.
- Correspondence is downright weird. Although Correspondence-based senses function more or less normally in a single Realm or area, they cannot reach into other Realms or areas. Co-location and teleportation are hazardous, dumping the traveler into random and often dangerous areas unless the player scores three successes or more on her roll.
- The Data Sphere does not function in the Three Worlds at all. Its metaphysical properties are drawn from, and limited to, the Digital Web.
- Entropy works normally in most regions. In the Underworld, however, Entropy-based spells have a -2 difficulty but unlock the darkest side of every ghost in the vicinity. For details, see ***Spirit Combatants*** (pp. 417-418), ***Umbrood Spirit Entities*** below.
- In the Low Umbra, all Arete rolls suffer a +2 difficulty penalty. Life and Prime are always vulgar, Forces and Matter do not work at all, and Paradox manifests as storms of screaming specters that tear holes in the world to let Oblivion through. Time and Correspondence manifest unreliable and inaccurate Effects. Entropy magick works as above (often drawing unwanted attention by its very presence), and only Mind and Spirit function normally... although with the increased difficulty on the Arete roll.
- Characters can use Spirit 3 magick to step sideways through the Pericarps (Gauntlets) between Realms, although certain Realms might require Spheres other than Spirit (say Mind, Forces, or even Time) instead of Spirit, at the Storyteller's option.
- Magick cast in Paradox Realms tends to backfire in awful ways, especially if the magick cast is related to the magick that got the mage sent into time out in the first place. See ***Reality Among the Realms*** under ***The Paradox Effect*** in **Chapter Ten** (p. 553).

As an overall rule, assume that *most* rules, within the Otherworlds, are optional. The unpredictable nature of the Otherworlds remains one of the few predictable constants in the notoriously inconstant Realms beyond Earth's material reality.

Example of Umbral Travel

Lee Ann Milner meditates in a darkened room, sinuous drifts of nag champa incense drifting past her face. Focusing on a faint bell only she can hear, she slides into a trance and sends forth her astral self...

At the gaming table, Lynn picks up her dice. "No one can see you leave your body," says the Storyteller, "so you don't need to worry about Paradox." Unlike the act of stepping sideways, astral travel is invisible to the naked eye, and thus it's coincidental. Lynn rolls Lee Ann's Arete Trait against the local Gauntlet. Here in Lee Ann's Chantry, that barrier's pretty thin. The difficulty of the roll, therefore, is 6, with three successes necessary. Lee Ann's Arete of 8 makes this a simple roll; even so, Lynn gets only one success with her first roll, and two more with her second. It takes a minute or so of meditation, but Lee Ann's astral self slips into the Penumbra.

Later, during a wilderness hike, Lee Ann steps sideways to venture into the Spirit Wilds. Bracing herself for the awful Avatar Storm, she's relieved to find that while the shrieking spirits still grimace and gnash their teeth at her as she passes through the barrier, the soul-scouring agony of past trips has faded. "Mark off a level of Bruised damage," the Storyteller says to Lynn. "It stings a bit, but there's no serious harm done." Following her instincts and the strange signs of this vivid landscape, Lee Ann heads off into the mist. Lynn rolls the character's Perception + Cosmology against a difficulty of 7 to see what Lee Ann finds...

Part VIII: Umbrood Spirit Entities

Infinity wears infinite masks. And for simplicity's sake, we call those masks *spirits*. Rooted in a word meaning "breath" – and, by extension, "life" – spirits embody cosmic and Earthly principles, giving recognizable identities to things beyond comprehension. In plain English, then, spirits give character and personality to natural forces and psychic ideas. So in game terms, they're characters who are far more transcendent than they might appear.

In the World of Darkness, spirits inhabit the Otherworlds and occasionally venture into material space as well. Some folks view them as gods or demons, totem allies or elemental forces. Mages catalog the spirit hosts with a bewildering array of names and titles, the most basic of which can be found in the sidebar nearby. And yet, as any mage worth that title understands, a spirit is more than a name or a set of powers. Each spirit is a principle or force incarnate – the essence of ideas given a relatable form. Folks familiar with the spirit world... most especially those who study the Spirit Sphere... know that

the entity you're dealing with is like the tip of an iceberg you never totally see.

For the Technocrats and other technomancers who insist on a materialist perspective, spirits are puzzles. The comforting term *aliens* comes up a lot in conversation, and most Technocrats view spirits as alien beings from alternate dimensions. This perspective isn't wrong, exactly, though it's limited. The word *alien* means "other," and that's what spirits are: something other than humanity.

To slap a different handle on such entities, some mages call the spirits *Umbrood* – a bastardized term meaning "the offspring of shadows." Again, that term's not wrong, though many spirits find it insulting. The term "brood" suggests children, and when mages use it, that suggests that mages feel parentally superior to spirits. It's not hard to understand, then, why spirits would get a bit hacked off at a presumptuous mortal who regards himself as the father of a cosmic entity. No wonder that so many mages find themselves in hot water with the spirits!

Ultimately, spirits are *Other*. As recognizable as they might seem, they should never feel too familiar. Although werewolves deal with spirits on a first-name basis, and many mages think they do the same, there should always be a sense of the ineffable – the sacred and indescribable – about even the most common spirit entities.

You See What You Expect to See

As mages throughout time have noticed, the appearance of a given spirit depends on what the viewer expects to see. In yet another example of the Rashomon Effect at work, a single spirit can look different ways to different people. Each mask of that spirit depends upon the expectations of the viewer. A classical Hermetic magus could behold a trickster spirit as an aspect of Hermes the Thief, laughing god of misdirection. His Apache counterpart views the ever-shifting face of Coyote, the lustful shapechanging beast-man whose pranks undermine stability but backfire on him in the end. To the media-hyped Virtual Adept in their company, that spirit is Bugs Bunny on crack. Their Scandinavian rune-keeper glances sideways at Loki, the grand liar... perhaps even the Marvel Comics version as portrayed by Tom Hiddleston! One spirit, four faces, all of them true, and yet none of them the real image of that Umbrood entity.

From a game standpoint, this offers lots of possibilities and keeps spirits from being just another set of Traits to throw fireballs at.

As a general guideline, assume that spirits are always more than they appear to be. The more powerful the spirit, the more varied its appearance. A simple earth elemental might appear more or less the same to everyone, whereas a tempter demon wears a multitude of masks. As an overall rule, assume that High Umbrood can manifest a variety of appearances, and Lower Umbrood retain a fairly consistent form.

At the core, a spirit *IS* what that spirit *IS*. A trickster spirit pulls tricks. An earth elemental will not burst into flame. A tempter demon offers enticing but ultimately malicious treats *because that's what that spirit DOES*. In the World of Darkness in general, and in **Mage** in particular, each spirit has a particular identity. Under all the masks it might wear, that identity remains firm. And that's the secret that a Master of Spirit – regardless of practice or affiliation – understands: the identity of a spirit comes through in the things it does, in the masks it wears, in the deals it makes. If you understand who and what you're dealing with, the masks aren't important. The core of the spirit comes through in its behavior.

Spirit Types

To get a common grasp on such elusive entities, **Mage** groups Umbrood into a handful of general but recognizable categories. The *characters* might not use this terminology, but the game rules do, simply because it's easier for a Storyteller to gauge the difference between an Incarna's abilities and the abilities of a Gaffling than it is to simply say, "*Just make it all up as you go along!*" Of course, a Storyteller who *wants* to just make it all up as she goes along is encouraged to do so, as long as that doesn't reduce her chronicle to a bunch of arbitrary garbage and her mind to a bowl of lukewarm soup.

An Umbral Powers Hierarchy

As a rough guide to common terminology, the Council of Nine Traditions agrees upon an *Umbral Powers Hierarchy* that its members use in common conversation. A Kha'vadi shaman might refer to such-and-such-entity as "*a Gaffling servitor of the Raven Incarna*," if only for clarity's sake, when she's speaking to some High Hermetic so-and-so. Even so, that shaman will have her own name for that spirit, and you can bet that the Hermetic has placed it somewhere on the Grand Celestial Roll of Cosmological Hierarchies.

Other groups, of course, have their own ways of looking at things. A Border Corps Technocrat, when confronted with the same Gaffling, would run it against a program of Cataloged Alien Anomaly Manifestations, looking to profile that creature's capabilities. A Hollow One might see a playful raven girl; the Templar at his side beholds a crow demon from Satan's hosts. A Bata'a houngan welcomes Brother Crow, an ally of Erzuli, but a Progenitor sees some extraphysical mutant entity worth experimenting on. In **Mage**, as in life, the truth of that spirit is in the eye of the beholder.

Essential Divinity, Godheads, and The Adversary

One of **Mage**'s thorniest elements, both in and out of the fictional world, involves the question of God and other spirits. To be blunt, where does God rank on the Umbral Hierarchy? What about Krishna? Is the Goddess somehow lower than God, or is Her consort a Horned God in a cosmos where the Christian God does not exist? How can someone wrestle with God, as Jacob does in the Bible, and does the existence of Raven preclude the existence of Allah or the Buddha? Where does Satan fit in there, if Satan even exists at all? After all, **Mage** posits the existence of a spiritual world filled with spiritual truths. Which god is God, and are there many gods or only One?

Ultimately, the capital-T Truth depends on what you want it to be. If your **Mage** chronicle favors your own Muslim, Baptist, Wiccan, or Tibetan Buddhist creed, then by all means decide that all roads lead to your Divinity of choice. If you're an existential atheist, then maybe all of this is just delusion. We're not here to

Greater Spirit Entities

- ***Essential Divinity*** (God/ Goddess/ The Great Spirit/ The One)
- ***Godheads/ Celestines/ God-Avatars*** (Zeus; Inanna; Jesus; Krishna; Satan; Grandfather; the Wyrm; Maiden, Mother, and Crone; etc.)
- ***The Adversary*** (often seen as Godhead, occasionally regarded as the Dark Twin of Essential Divinity, frequently not recognized at all)

Lesser Powers

Aeons/ Incarnae/ Godlings

Lords and Ladies/ The High Umbrood

Totem Avatars

Archangels

Demon Lords

Greater Courtiers

Bodhisattva Manifestations

Praeceptors/ Demigods

Seraphim

Greater Demons

Oracles

Jagglings

Greater Court Servitors

Minions/ Lower Umbrood

Cherubim

Guardian Angels

Demon Hosts

Gafflings/ Epiphlings

Lesser Courtiers

Djinni

Loa

Saints

Miscellaneous Spirits (exist outside the Hierarchy; power ranges from Incarna to Minion)

Elementals (manifestations of Earthly forces)

Banes (a.k.a. Wyrm spirits)

Chaos Manifestations (Wyld spirits)

Pattern Entities (Weaver spirits)

Naturae/ Kami (Nature spirits)

Ghosts (the Restless Dead)

Ancestors (the Honored Dead)

Bygones (mythic creatures)

Paradox Spirits (manifestations of metaphysical retribution)

Legends (personifications of mythic figures)

Abstracts (quantum astral enigmas)

Web Spirits (entities native to the Digital Web)

Sendings (weird psychic emanations)

Cthonic Entities (primal enigmas that defy understanding)

Those Beyond (alien entities, theoretically of malignant or indifferent disposition)

Indented and italicized entries reflect entities that do not fit comfortably into the hierarchy's ranks.

For examples of different spirit characters, see **Appendix I**; the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and **Wraith: The Oblivion** lines; and a variety of **Mage** sourcebooks.

tell you how to believe or to force a religion (or the lack of one) down your throat. Maybe all spirits really *are* aliens or angels or demons or archetypes. That's *your* call to make, not ours.

Within the **Mage** world, the various Traditions have been arguing these points for centuries. The Technocracy discarded an official creed beyond Enlightened Science, and the Disparates have left that question off the table, definitely for now and probably for good. The Umbral Hierarchy represents an uneasy compromise with lots of room to move. It's certainly not definitive, and it neither demeans nor demands a single point of faith. At the top of that Hierarchy, however, the terms *Essential Divinity*, *Godhead*, and *The Adversary* deserve some explanation:

Essential Divinity is the name given to That Which Cannot Be Named – the *I AM THAT I AM* at the core of sacred mysteries. An indefinable essence that pervades Creation, it transcends names and identities. As ineffable things go, this one scores the top of the list.

Godhead is what you get when you assign Divinity a face, personality, and name. Sometimes that Divinity incarnates itself in an *avatar*: an identity that humans can relate to (Krishna, Mary, Old Man, and so forth). Other times, it remains a transcendent yet still relatable force... a Holy Spirit, if you will, understood by certain people in certain terms.

The Adversary is the cosmic Antagonist, the force of Opposition that may or may not be another aspect of Divinity. Some folks see it as an evil anti-god, others view it as a rebellious lesser creation, and still others view it as a shadow of Essential Divinity. Many people refuse to recognize it at all or theorize that it exists because people *think* it exists. In any case, the Adversary is godlike... and might, as the Nephandi believe, be

that summation of cosmic Absolute against which god is the rebel who will eventually be consumed.

Compared to these Greater Powers, all other spirits are functionaries – courtiers, servants, embodiments of principles, or incarnations of ideas. They've got their own identities, even though such identities often remain unclear to human witnesses. At the top of the Hierarchy, however, the Greater Powers defy easy categorization, transcend game Traits, and command powers far beyond any human reach.

What that means, in the long run, is up to you.

Spirit Traits

As mentioned earlier in the ***Combat*** section, spirits don't use the same rules that mortal characters do. Ephemeral entities of Will and Essence, these beings use distinct Traits that work in certain ways:

Willpower

Essentially the physical Trait for spirit beings, Willpower allows Umbrood characters to fly, chase, attack, climb, escape, and perform most other activities that a human character's Dexterity or Stamina can do.

When a spirit struggles with another spirit, those characters resolve their issues with a resisted roll of Willpower against Willpower. If the spirit's trying to accomplish something on its own, the Storyteller strives to make a successful roll on its behalf, just as any other player would do. In either case, the difficulty of that roll depends on the task, as per the chart nearby.

Spirit Tasks

Difficulty	Action
3	Easy
5	Simple
6	Straightforward
8	Difficult
10	Virtually impossible

Rage

A reflection of a spirit's determination and wrath, Rage handles those tasks that would normally require Strength: breaking things, hurting people, throwing force against an opponent.

When a spirit attacks another character, the Storyteller rolls one die for each point of Rage against difficulty 6. Each success inflicts one health level of lethal damage. Mages – thanks to their Awakened Avatars – can try to soak this damage by using the Avatar Background as a soak roll. Night-Folk with the proper Disciplines or Gifts can try to soak this damage as well. Most mortals, however, cannot endure spiritual injury, and normal armor (that is, armor that hasn't been enhanced with magick or technomagick) means nothing to a spirit's Rage.

(**Note:** In **Werewolf: The Apocalypse 20th Anniversary Edition**, spirit-based Rage damage is aggravated. Because mages don't regenerate aggravated damage, however, this option may be too fatal for a **Mage** chronicle. If the Storyteller decides to let the Avatar Background soak aggravated damage, then the usual **Werewolf** rule may be used instead. Using the agg-damage option, however, can send the average mage straight to the cemetery.)

Gnosis

The sublime knowledge that spirits understand, Gnosis allows a spirit to perceive and communicate with the world around it. Most tasks that would normally involve Social or Mental Traits – as well as feats or attacks that involve certain ***Charms*** (see below) – employ the Gnosis Trait.

Essence

Representing the raw energy of an Umbral being, Essence is the stuff from which spirits are made. In game terms, each point of damage scored upon a spirit, after that spirit's soak roll, removes one point of Essence. When that spirit casts a charm, it often spends Essence in order to do so. Typically, the Essence comes from the total of that spirit's Willpower + Rage + Gnosis. The Storyteller, however, can always add or subtract from that base essence in order to reflect especially strong or weak spirits.

As a spirit starts to lose Essence, it begins to look haggard and translucent. Damage wears away that spirit's being until its ephemeral form gets dispelled. Once it dies, the injured spirit dissipates into the Umbra and remains gone for several hours. (Storyteller's judgment, although as a rough guideline you could figure 20 hours, minus one hour for each point of that spirit's Gnosis Trait.) After that time, the spirit re-forms with a single Essence point, then flees to some secluded spot where it can safely recharge itself in a state called ***Slumber***, described below.

Spirit Feats

Although they might occasionally assume human form, spirits aren't mortal beings. As creatures of ephemera, they handle certain things differently than other characters do.

Communication

Umbrood entities communicate through impressions and feelings, rarely through words as people understand that term. The spirit tongue is more a matter of reading and sending such impressions than it is a language of words and sounds. Even so, many of the more intelligent spirits – especially totems, demons, angels, courtiers, and godheads – can speak and comprehend human languages when they choose to do so.

Until and unless these entities decide to communicate this way, a mortal needs Spirit 2 in order to share a conversation with the Umbrood. Without such magick, a human might use Perception + Awareness or Enigmas to try to puzzle out a spirit's feelings and attempt to communicate with it; this method, though, is crude and imprecise – kind of like trying to mime a conversation with someone from a vastly different culture and social class than your own. (The roll's difficulty depends on the alien-ness of the spirit in question, but it is rarely less than 7.)

Movement

All spirits can fly or float through the Umbra. At top speed, an Umbrood entity can move at (20 + Willpower) yards or meters per turn. It's worth mentioning, though, that time and distance work strangely in the Otherworlds, often warping in unpredictable ways when viewed by human beings.

Slumber

A weakened spirit retreats to a secluded region where it can safely restore its Essence to full strength. Godheads, totems, kami, and ancestor spirits often go to temples or shrines where mortal belief and reverence nurture their recovery and provide sacred ground where such spirits feel safe. Other entities flee to hidden Glens, Courts, or Afterworlds. Spirits of malaise might retreat to Blights, hells, or even the Umbral side of crime scenes and atrocities. During its recovery, the spirit floats in a state of Slumber, dreaming whatever passes for dreams in a spirit's mind.

Binding Spirits Into Fetishes

While Slumbering, an Umbrood entity may be bound into a Spirit-fueled Wonder – a *Fetish* – by a person with Spirit 4. That Fetish won't be usable, however, until the spirit returns to its full Essence – the item draws off of the imprisoned spirit's Essential self. Even so, it's the Fetish's user, not the spirit itself, that activates that Fetish... and the spirit is very much a prisoner inside that item.

Although certain spirits strike bargains with mortals who craft Fetish Wonders, most entities get *VERY* annoyed if they wind up being held prisoner inside some presumptuous human's toy. Considering that spirits are more or less immortal, it's not wise to court a spirit's anger by imprisoning it within a Fetish unless you're some sort of badass... like, say, a werewolf or master shaman.

Spirits in Combat

As detailed earlier in the ***Spirit Combatants*** section (pp. 417-418), spirits attack with Willpower and inflict damage with Rage. They also soak damage with Willpower, possibly augmented with the ***Armor*** Charm, below. All forms of damage – bashing, lethal, and aggravated – are the same to spirit entities. Any damage a spirit doesn't soak gets deducted from its Essence Trait.

Most mortal beings cannot touch spirits unless there's magick involved. A human character needs Spirit 2 in order to make physical contact with a spirit that has not employed the ***Materialize*** Charm (again, see below). For other details, see ***Spirit Combatants*** and the ***Spirit Combat*** section of the ***Order of Battle chart*** (p. 445).

Spirit Charms

Every spirit commands a certain number of metaphysical powers called *Charms*. Innate extensions of a spirit's self, Charms typically cost Essence to employ. Certain Charms (like ***Feedback***) are rather specific, whereas others (***Armor***, ***Blast***) are open to all kinds of Storyteller creativity. Because all Umbrood are

Optional Rule: Umbrood Magick

Although Umbrood beings do not use Awakened magick the ways mortals understand that term, the truly powerful ones have mystic abilities that, in game terms, work very much like magick. And so, under this *optional rule*, a handful of spirit entities have Arete and Sphere ratings to reflect their godlike talents.

Unlike mortal mages, these beings don't use a focus or gather Paradox. On the Earthly plane, however, an Umbrood character who suffers a botched roll when casting a vulgar Effect is immediately banished to the other side of the Gauntlet for at least one day for every point of Arete that character possesses. Thus, powerful Umbrood avoid flashy magicks in the world of men.

embodiments of natural forces and principles, Charms do not invoke Paradox on either side of the Gauntlet.

Several of the following Charms invoke destructive natural forces – fire, electricity, floods, and so on. For the larger effects of such forces, check out the ***Environmental Hazards*** section of this chapter (pp. 435-441).

- **Airt Sense:** A natural ability of all spirit entities, this Charm allows spirits to find their way through complex Otherworldly non-geography. To find a particular place, or to locate a given creature or spirit among the realms, the Storyteller may roll the tracking spirit's Gnosis against a variable difficulty – 6 in most cases, 8 or 9 in the cases of obscure locations or powerful spirits. As an innate ability, this Charm costs no Essence to employ.

- **Appear:** Revealing itself in an immaterial form, an entity can use this Charm to manifest on the physical side of the Gauntlet, unable to touch but also immune from *being* touched. Doing so costs 10 Essence when the spirit appears in a high-Gauntlet area, although it may cost fewer points (Storyteller's option) in places or circumstances with especially low Gauntlet ratings (3 or less).

- **Armor:** By spending two points of Essence, the spirit gains a dice pool equal to its Gnosis rating; that soak pool applies to bashing and lethal damage. For one additional point per die, the Armor Charm may protect against aggravated damage too. Either way, the protection lasts until the end of the scene in which it is invoked. The spirit may invoke its armor at any point before an attacker rolls her damage against the spirit.

- **Blast:** An all-purpose attack Charm, this power projects damaging energies against the spirit's opponents. Those energies cost one Essence per die of bashing damage, two Essence per die of lethal damage, and three Essence per die of aggravated damage.

  (For a deadlier option, the spirit may simply spend a point of Essence and roll the spirit's Rage as aggravated damage, as seen in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse 20th Anniversary Edition**. As noted above, however, this option may be too lethal for **Mage** chronicles.)

  Whatever type of damage it inflicts, the form of the Blast depends on the nature of the spirit; a fire elemental could breathe flame, a frost spirit might spin frost, a shrieking horror from beyond space might warp its target's bones, and so forth. The spirit does not need to hit, and the attack cannot be dodged, although the Spirit Sphere can be used as countermagick against the Blast.

  As a rough guide to range, assume that this Charm can reach one yard for each point of Essence in the spirit's permanent Essence Trait. An Essence 20 entity, then, could Blast an opponent from up to 20 yards away. Spending Essence does not decrease this range; that same entity could still Blast its opponent from 20 yards away even when its Essence has dropped to 5.

- **Blighted Touch:** Invoking the essence of corruption, a demonic entity can bring out a target's worst qualities. If the spirit successfully inflicts damage upon its opponent – including damage at range, via the Blast charm –the target must make a Willpower roll, with the difficulty being the spirit's Rage. If the target's roll fails, the character's worst qualities surge to the surface, making him aggressive, arrogant, lusty, depressive, or whatever else fits his personality. That change of personality lasts for several hours – generally an hour or so per point in the spirit's Rage. If the player botches that Willpower roll, then the blight upon his character's personality becomes more-or-less permanent.

- **Brand:** Certain spirits of the Digital Web use this Charm to brand netizens or other spirits with tags that identify the target even if she changes into some new shape. Three Essence inflicts a brand that lasts until the target leaves Netspace, and five Essence tags her with a brand that lasts indefinitely. (Storyteller's discretion about how long the brand lasts and what it takes to remove it.) Typically employed by Free-Ranging Electronic Encroachment Kill Systems (FREEKS) and other countermeasure and security programs.

- **Break Reality:** The hallmark of a chaos spirit, this Charm changes the Umbral form of an object into some other – maybe radically different – form. A wall becomes mist, fire might become ice, a tree could become a fountain of water. To transform a given object, the Storyteller rolls that spirit's Gnosis; simple transformations would be difficulty 4 or 5, with radical changes rated at difficulty

8 or 9. Success transmutes the object into its new form, failure costs the spirit one Essence, and a botch costs the spirit a point of Gnosis as well.

- **Calcify:** With this Charm, a Pattern Spider binds its target into its Pattern Webs. To use the Charm, the Storyteller rolls the spirit's Willpower in a resisted roll against the target's Avatar Background (or against the target's Rage Trait if that target is one of the shapeshifting Night-Folk). Each success subtracts one dot from a Physical Attribute of the spirit's choice; when that Attribute has been reduced to zero, the target is stuck in the Pattern Web. From that point onward, the target must be freed by his companions – he himself remains physically helpless, although he could use Mind magick if he does not have to move in order to do so. This charm does not work at all on Marauders, Nephandi, or mages with an Entropy Sphere of 4 or higher... the Dynamic or Entropic energies around such mages are simply too potent to contain in the Pattern Web. This Charm costs no Essence but requires a turn of web-spinning for each point of Physical Attribute drained. Once he's freed, the character's Traits return to normal.

- **Call for Aid:** With an expenditure of five Essence, the spirit calls upon other entities of its kind. The Storyteller rolls the spirit's Willpower, with the difficulty based on the likelihood of other spirits being nearby at the time: difficulty 3 if the other spirits are within sight, difficulty 6 in an area where such spirits are common, difficulty 8 for unusual spirits within that region, and difficulty 9 for rare spirits outside their normal habitat.

- **Cleanse the Blight:** With a wave of purifying energy, a nature spirit, angel, or other benevolent entity can purge spiritual corruption from its immediate area. The Storyteller rolls the spirit's Gnosis against a difficulty based on the level of corruption – from 4 or 5 for an area with mild taint to 9 or 10 for areas of massive abuse and sickness. This Charm costs 10 Essence.

- **Cling:** Using this Charm, an entity can cling to an object or another creature. The spirit must first make a successful grappling attack in order to hang onto an unwilling target. After a successful grappling roll, the spirit gains five extra Willpower dice for the purposes of hanging on and resisting other grappling attacks. Once the spirit latches on, the target can free himself only by reducing the Spirit's Essence to zero, pulling it free with a successful grappling attack, or else binding the spirit into a fetish. This Charm costs one Essence point per use, but it lasts until the spirit lets go or is otherwise removed.

- **Control Electrical Systems:** Engaging its bond with technology, an electricity elemental or spirit of electrical tech can seize control of an electric device and run it according to the spirit's desires. The Storyteller rolls the spirit's Gnosis against a difficulty based upon the complexity of the machine or system – from 3 to control light bulbs to 9 to control a HIT Mark or cybernetic gear. The Essence cost likewise depends upon the sophistication of the device, from one Essence to control simple objects to five Essence to command complex machinery.

- **Corruption:** As a demon or other spiritual temper employs this Charm, the Storyteller spends one Essence point. The spirit whispers foul suggestions in the target's ear (perhaps in a voice only that victim can hear...), and the victim must make a Willpower roll or else act out the corrupting spirit's suggestions. If that character might be inclined to act on the suggestion to begin with (like, say, a bank teller facing a bunch of money that hasn't yet been logged into the system), she might not even try to resist it.

- **Create Fire:** With a successful Gnosis roll, the spirit can ignite a fire. The difficulty depends upon the size of blaze – from 3 for small fires to 9 for an inferno. The Essence cost also depends upon the size of the fire, ranging from one point for a simple flicker to five for a conflagration.

- **Create Wind:** Elemental air command conjures windstorms. Essence cost ranges from one for a light breeze to 20 for a tornado.

- **Death Fertility:** Is something already killing a living thing? If so, a spirit can use this Charm to accelerate the process. Assuming that the target's already suffering from some malady – injury, infection, starvation, freezing, disease, poison, etc. – an expenditure of five Essence and a Rage roll against the target's Willpower Trait will inflict further damage upon the target. Each success causes one health level of lethal harm, and the spreading sickness or wound might have other effects as well – see ***Health and Injury***, ***Harsh Weather and Environments***, ***Starvation and Thirst***, and ***Drugs, Poison, and Disease*** for possible effects.

- **Digital Disruption:** Deployed only by Digital Web entities, this Charm inflicts either a soft de-rez – that is, one that dumps the target out of the Web and back into Meatspace without hurting him – or a hard de-rez, which inflicts two automatic health levels in lethal damage *and* deducts two points of a Mental Attribute unless the target makes a Stamina roll, difficulty 7 (the damage and Trait loss heal as lethal damage). The entity must hit the target with a Willpower-based attack roll, but success automatically dumps the target out of Netspace. A soft de-rez costs three Essence, and a hard one costs five.

- **Disable:** This stunning Charm can paralyze a single victim. The Storyteller rolls the spirit's Rage against the appropriate difficulty (target's Stamina + 3, or Rage if the target is another spirit). Cost is one Essence point for each level of the target's current health or one point per Essence point if the Charm gets used against a spirit

entity. Minimum cost is 10 Essence. The paralysis lasts one turn for every Essence point spent... and yes, the spirit can spend extra Essence to disable its opponent for longer periods of time.

- **Disorient:** By altering both nearby landmarks and the target's sense of direction, the entity confuses its opponents on either side of the Gauntlet. To do so, the Storyteller rolls the spirit's Gnosis against difficulty 6 or the local Gauntlet rating, whichever is higher. Possessed only by spirits of confusion and the raw Dynamic energies often called *Wyld spirits*, this Charm costs no Essence.
- **Dream Journey:** For 10 Essence points (15 if the spirit wants the target to remember it in the morning), an entity may intrude on a sleeping subject's dreams. Although the Charm has no lasting effects beyond the emotional pain or comfort involved in that dream, the spirit can do whatever it damn well pleases within the confines of the dream realm. Of course, if the subject is a lucid dreamer with a Demesne, the intruder might get more than it bargained for... See the ***Lucid Dreaming*** Talent (p. 294) and the ***Demesne*** Background (pp. 310-311) in **Chapter Six** for details.
- **Ease Pain:** By spending one Essence, the spirit may ease another creature's pain. In game terms, this alleviates all wound-based penalties except penalties to movement. The Charm doesn't actually heal the injuries, however – it merely soothes the pain involved. Each Essence point removes the subject's pain for roughly one hour.
- **Element Sense:** Through instinctive contact with its native element (earth, fire, etc.), an elemental spirit can sense things that happen to be touching, or happening near, sources of that entity's element. When activated, this Charm extends in a circle roughly 500 feet around the elemental itself and lets the entity perceive things that occur within a yard or two of its element, so long as the source of that element lies within the area affected by the Charm. A fire elemental, for instance, could sense things within a yard of a candle flame or fireplace if that flame flickers within 500 feet of the elemental itself. Each use of this Charm costs five Essence and lasts roughly an hour.
- **Feedback:** Possessed only by certain aggressive Digital Web spirits, this Charm fires off a shattering wail of sonic or electronic feedback. Every two points of Essence put into the attack inflics one health level of bashing damage in the form of headaches, scrambled senses, mental trauma, and misfiring nervous systems. Every five points in the attack inflict a level of lethal damage – cooking organs, killing brain cells, electrocuting flesh, and disrupting muscular control. This Charm affects only travelers in the Digital Web, but it can kill their meat back home.
- **Flee:** With this Charm, the spirit can temporarily boost its Willpower to 15 for the purposes of escaping danger. This bonus does not actually raise the Trait with regards to activities other than escape, although it might aid a spirit who's trying to avoid or hide from a confrontation. Costs two Essence per turn.
- **Flood:** A typical trick for storm spirits and water elements, this Charm raises the natural water level to flood a given area. The size of that area depends upon the power of the spirit: a Gaffling-level entity could flood a small building or a short city block, whereas a Jaggling could flood a small town. (Don't ask how much an *Incarna* could flood with this Charm...) The Charm normally costs one point of Essence per turn to use, and it generally takes several turns to flood a significant area. If there is no water around, the spirit would have to import some via storm clouds, broken water mains, or other potential sources of a flood.
- **Freeze:** A sudden drop in temperature frosts the immediate area. The spirit's Rage Trait drops by one, and every character within that area suffers one health level in lethal damage for every point in the spirit's new Rage Trait. (Rage 6 would drop to Rage 5, inflicting five dice of lethal damage, for example.) The range of this Charm is roughly 20 feet (three meters) for every dot in the spirit's permanent Rage Trait. That sharp drop in temperature could have other effects too – see ***Harsh Weather and Environments*** under ***Environmental Hazards***.
- **Healing:** With a surge of spiritual energy, the spirit can heal an injured physical being. To do so, the Storyteller rolls the spirit's Gnosis – difficulty 6 for lethal damage, difficulty 8 for aggravated damage. That spirit can heal one health level for each point in that spirit's Gnosis Trait and may use this Charm only once on a character per scene. The spirit could heal each of six characters, for example, but it could only do so once. The Charm costs no Essence, but the spirit will probably want some sort of favor in return for the healing.
- **Illuminate:** Suffusing itself with light, the entity illuminates an area roughly 20 yards or meters from its body or changes the color and intensity of existing lights in the area. This Charm requires no roll or Essence cost.
- **Influence:** For three Essence points, the spirit can gradually shift a subject's mood in whichever direction that spirit desires. A successful roll of that entity's Gnosis against the subject's Willpower sets the Charm in motion; the spirit can then influence that person from a distance, with no words or obvious contact between them.
- **Inhabit:** A lesser and more benign version of the ***Possession*** Charm allows the spirit to briefly inhabit a living creature or inanimate object. That spirit slips into the subject, speaking with her voice and perceiving through her various senses. The Storyteller makes a Gnosis roll, difficulty of the subject's Willpower (for a living target) or the local Gauntlet (for an object). If the subject consents

to be inhabited, no roll is necessary. This Charm costs five Essence and lasts for one scene. If the spirit tries to compel its host into any sort of harm or danger, the spirit is immediately ejected from that host.

- **Insight:** Through this Charm, an entity can puzzle out one hidden element of a target's identity, history, or personality. If the spirit tries to uncover a specific piece of information, the Charm costs 10 Essence; if the entity simply attempts to find something worth using, the cost is only five Essence.

- **Iron Will:** By deciding upon a single, specific course of action (*guard this place*, *watch this child*, *find this book*, and so forth), a spirit may invoke this Charm and add five extra dice to any roll that helps it meet that purpose or resist being driven away from the task. Costs one Essence per hour.

- **Lightning Bolt:** With a surge of power, the entity hurls a thunderbolt. Costs two Essence for each die of lethal damage inflicted. (See also the ***Blast*** Charm and ***Electrocution*** under ***Environmental Hazards***.)

- **Materialize:** This Charm allows a spirit to assume physical shape in the material world... a dangerous thing, especially in the age of machine-gun fire. To do so, the spirit's Gnosis must be higher than the local Gauntlet rating. Once materialized, the spirit can go wherever it wants to go, provided that the local Gauntlet rating is no higher than the spirit's Gnosis -2, and assuming that no one has bound that spirit in a mystic pentacle or hypertech spirit cage (in game terms, a Spirit 4 Effect; see the ***Spirit Sphere*** entry in **Chapter Ten**.) If the entity gets killed in the material realm, its form is dispersed and the spirit winds up banished to the Umbra in Slumber, as if its Essence had been dispersed in the spirit realm.

  Under the old World of Darkness rules, a materialized spirit had to buy its Physical Attributes, health levels, and Abilities per the chart below. (A materialized spirit still uses its Gnosis for Social and Mental Attributes.) This approach allows a spirit to expand its capabilities, so long as it has enough Essence to do so. Alternately, the spirit can simply manifest and use its Willpower, Rage, Gnosis, and Essence as usual, without bothering to generate Attributes and Abilities, as per **Werewolf: The Apocalypse 20th Anniversary Edition**. In that case, however, the spirit remains bound to a single form in the Earthly realm and cannot adjust its size or capabilities. The spirits in **Appendix I** have been built using the physical forms suggested by the older rules.

  Typically, a spirit soaks damage with its Willpower Trait, plus the Armor Charm if it has that power. When a materialized spirit gets hit, however, the Stamina Trait (plus armor) soaks damage if that Trait is higher than Willpower. To a materialized spirit entity, bashing, lethal, and aggravated damage are essentially the same – all three drain Essence points if they manage to inflict damage against the spirit's body. If that spirit takes damage, its materialized health levels absorb the damage first; once those health levels are gone, the spirit can take up to five more health levels in damage before its Essence dissipates back into the Umbra. Whether or not the dead materialized husk remains behind after the spirit's Essence has departed is a Storyteller call. Given the long histories of "demon's blood," "angel feathers," and "dead alien bodies," however, tradition suggests that a corpse should remain behind.

Essence Cost	Trait
5	Initial manifestation (Paradox spirits do not pay this cost).
1	Per one Physical Attribute level.
1	Per two Ability levels.
1	Seven initial health levels.
1	Per additional health levels (each extra health level also increases size).
1	Weaponry; per die of aggravated damage above Strength damage.
1	Per physical health level healed.

- **Meld:** Elemental spirits can merge with their native element by using this Charm, simply disappearing into the element in question. This trick works only for the spirit's native element, however – an air elemental cannot meld into wood. The charm costs two Essence and one turn to employ. At the end of that time, the element may be disturbed by the spirit's passage, but the spirit itself cannot be seen or affected. Obviously, this Charm requires a decent amount of the element in question.

- **Mind Speech:** For three Essence, a spirit can project images and impressions, or speak directly into a subject's mind, using a form of telepathy. The subject understands the spirit in whatever language she considers her native tongue. If the subject resists the message, the spirit could spend three Essence per die to try to win a resisted roll against the target's Willpower (difficulty 6 for both parties).

- **Open Moon Bridge:** A willing spirit with this Charm may open up a moon bridge from one Umbral location to another. For such service, of course, that entity will want a significant favor. The Charm costs no Essence, and the moon bridge can reach up to 1000 miles (1600 km) from the spirit's current location.

- **Peek:** The entity peers through the Gauntlet from the Penumbra to the physical world. Costs no Essence.

- **Possession:** The awful power of demons and other corrupting entities, this Charm allows a spirit to enter and command an object or living thing. As with the ***Inhabit*** Charm, Possession allows the spirit to see, hear, speak, and

otherwise interact with the world through the target's body; in this case, however, that body may be warped in horrific ways through the spirit's influence... becoming, in many cases, a freakish *fomor* (see **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and **Infernalism: The Path of Screams** for details).

It's an article of faith that a possessed person has to bear some previous form of corruption in order to open the door for demonic possession. Whether or not this is true remains a Storyteller call. In any case, the possessing entity finds a secluded spot in the Umbra (often protected by other allied entities) and then begins the possession process. In game terms, the Storyteller spends 10 Essence and then rolls the spirit's Gnosis against a difficulty of the target's Willpower (or, for an object, difficulty 4). The better she rolls, the faster the possession takes place:

Successes	Time Taken
1	Six hours.
2	Three hours.
3	One hour.
4	15 minutes.
5	Five minutes.
6+	Instantaneous.

Until the possession is complete, the entity may be attacked in the Umbra; any successful attack on that entity breaks the Charm. Once the possession has taken hold, however, the corruption is usually permanent. A successful exorcism using Spirit 4/Life 3/ Prime 2 magick can eject the spirit from its host, as can a successful attack through the **True Faith** Merit (see **Appendix II**). Until and unless such exorcisms have been performed, however, this Charm and its effects tend to last until the spirit departs its host.

- **Quake:** This elemental power allows the spirit to literally shake the material world. For five Essence, the entity can cause the earth to shake, rattle, and roll within a one mile radius of that spirit's presence on either side of the Gauntlet. Each additional five Essence escalates the intensity of the quake, from a notable tremor at five to a devastating catastrophe at 30.

- **Re-form:** For 20 Essence, the spirit may instantly disappear from its current location and appear somewhere else in the spirit realms... usually far away from its enemies.

- **Shapeshift:** With a five-point expenditure of Essence, the spirit can look like whatever it wants to look like. That new form doesn't have any additional powers or abilities, though spirits tend to be fairly protean when it comes to things like image, limbs, or size.

- **Short Out:** Three Essence allow the entity to short out nearby electrical systems with a Gnosis roll, difficulty 6. Some systems, however, are harder to disrupt than other ones are, especially when hypertech is involved – see the ***Control Electrical Systems*** Charm for details.

- **Shatter Glass:** Flexing its will, the spirit breaks all the glass in the area. The Storyteller rolls the spirit's Gnosis, difficulty 6. The base shatter area is roughly 10 yards, and each success makes the affected area 10 yards larger. Costs no Essence.

- **Solidify Reality:** A Charm for Stasis spirits only, this power allows the entity to spin a Pattern Web, bringing a choking form of order to its surroundings. With a successful Willpower roll, the spirit may craft a spiritual wall so thick that no method short of high-powered Entropy or Spirit magick can bring it down. The difficulty of that roll depends on how large, thick, and potent the Pattern Web will be; a small boost for existing Stasis would be 5 or 6, whereas a vast web spun across a chaotic place would be 9 or 10. The Essence cost also depends upon the difficulty of that Web's construction – from one for a small and simple Web to 20 for a large and static barrier. For other details (including the use of a Pattern Web as a weapon), see the ***Calcify*** Charm entry.

- **Soul Reading:** A common trick for demonic or aristocratic entities, this Charm allows the spirit a brief but revealing glimpse of a mortal's passions and temperament. It's not mind reading, *per se*, but a fairly accurate gauge of who a mortal is, what she wants, and how she feels in that moment. Costs three Essence.

- **Spirit Away:** The awful talent of Paradox entities and other dreaded spirits, this Charm allows the spirit to snatch a creature or character from the material world and then bring him to its personal Realm. For 25 Essence and four or more successes on a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, the entity can grab someone; if that grab succeeds, the spirit and its prisoner go directly to that spirit's Realm – no stops in between. The very next turn, both beings wind up in the Realm. The prisoner can try to escape, of course, but unless she manages to counter the grab with a successful dodge, she's goin' down... or up... or wherever...

- **Spirit Static:** A spirit of order and Stasis can raise the local Gauntlet rating by one level with this Charm. Up to three entities can cooperate on this task, raising the Gauntlet by three. To harden the Gauntlet, the Static spirits must focus on the task, lowering all of their dice pools by two for the duration of the static effect. This Charm costs no Essence, only concentration.

- **Swift Flight:** By spending one point of Essence per turn, the spirit can fly at three times its normal speed, up to ([60 + Willpower] x 3) yards or meters per turn.

- **System Havoc:** A Charm employed by Digital Web spirits and electronic elementals, this power allows a spirit to

wreak havoc on electrical energies, causing most sorts of non-magickal equipment to short out, burn out, or even explode. For two Essence, the spirit can disrupt fragile electrical systems (radios, computers, lights, etc.) With five Essence, it can fry any small electrical system that's not designed or protected with hypertech. And with 10 Essence, it can disrupt (and probably destroy) electronic gear that is protected with hypertech, or else cause widespread damage in massive electrical systems, like city power grids.

- **Terror:** Through awesome majesty or horrific appearance, the spirit invokes a primal, screaming fear. Mortals and other spirit beings confronted with this entity and its Charm must make Willpower rolls, difficulty 7, or else tremble with soul-deep terror. (If the roll fails, the character is at minus three dice to all dice pools if she tries to act; she succumbs to headlong flight if she can manage to run or fly away from the spirit.) A botch on the Willpower roll reduces the target to weeping, fetal panic. The charm costs three Essence to activate. By spending 10 Essence instead, the entity can raise that Willpower roll's difficulty to 9, force everything that fails that roll to collapse in fear, and subtract three dice from even the targets who *do* make the roll. For even nastier effects of this Charm on unfortunate characters, see ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** under ***Part III: Health and Injury***.

- **Track:** For five Essence, the entity can track a certain being, without error, throughout the Otherworlds. Certain beings might not be willing or able to enter certain Realms (say, a demon faced with a heaven), but beyond that, the target of this Charm shines like a beacon to the pursuing spirit.

- **Umbral Storm:** Summoning an Otherworldly storm (often like a hurricane, but possibly much weirder than that...), the spirit invokes high winds (40 mph) and driving rains. This being the Umbra, those rains might be blood, frogs, Skittles, or some other cascading material. For five Essence, the storm covers roughly a mile in diameter; for every two additional Essence points spent, that spirit can increase the winds by 10 mph or the storm's size by 10%. A favored trick for elementals and storm spirits, this Umbral tempest lasts until it blows over naturally.

- **Umbraquake:** This shattering Charm shakes the local Umbrascape with such force that everyone standing within its range (roughly a half mile) suffers half the spirit's Rage in bashing damage each turn, either from the shaking ground or from collapsing structures, falling trees, and other debris. Each turn's worth of quake costs five Essence. A flying character is, of course, immune to the damage, though perhaps not from the sound- and shockwave of the quake.

- **Updraft:** A potent gust of wind lifts human-sized creatures into the air. The Storyteller rolls the spirit's Willpower against difficulty 6; for each success, the spirit can lift one creature of roughly 300 pounds or less. Costs no Essence.

- **Waves:** This elemental spirit Charm creates strong currents on or under the surface of bodies of water. Churning waters to froth, the spirit can swamp boats, drown swimmers, and send waves crashing against shores or vessels. Such applications cost five Essence to affect a 50 foot radius, and the effects last roughly five minutes for each five Essence spent.

Roleplaying and Storytelling Spirit Entities

From a game systems standpoint, a spirit is simply a character – a bundle of Traits and motivations that deals with your heroes just as any other character would.

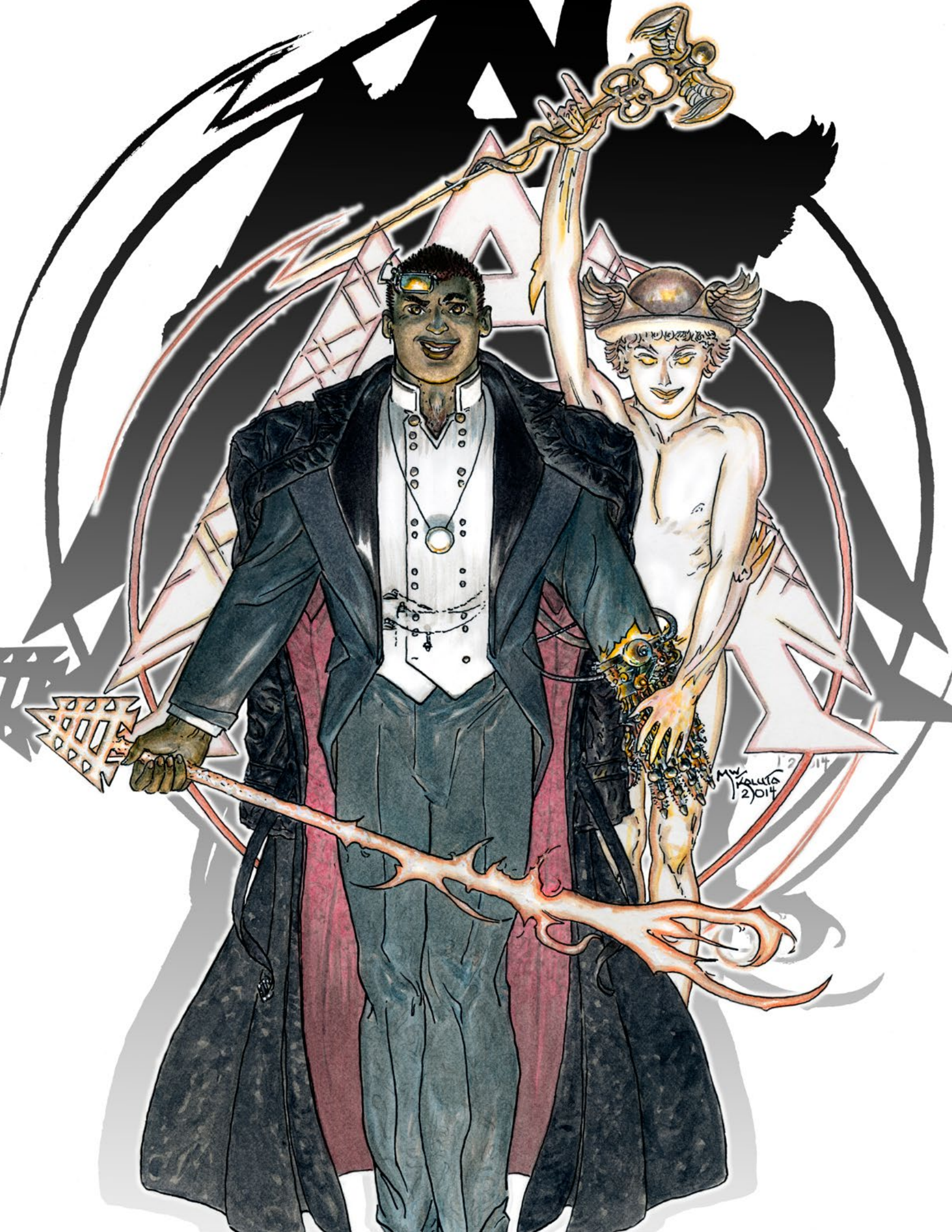
And yet, on a dramatic level, a spirit is something *more* than that. Every spirit ought to carry a sense of strangeness when it appears. Winds blow, shadows curl, flames flicker, and noises go silent. The mere presence of a spirit prickles the senses too: hairs rise up on the back of your arms, chills clutch the base of your spine, sights and sounds appear to deepen or fade in the presence of a spirit. A collection of Traits can't get such things across... but the Storyteller and the players can.

Atmospheric Powers

To emphasize the uncanny nature of spirit entities, the Storyteller may give such characters a variety of minor powers that function as story elements: the ability to chill a room with a glance, cry a river of blood, summon every bird or cat within the area, and so on. Flies might sing and trees might speak when a powerful spirit comes near. From a gaming standpoint, these atmospheric powers should simply *happen*, without rolls or Essence-point expenditures. To be fair, such powers should not be overt attacks or defenses – merely quirks of narration that show that your heroes are dealing with something *Other*, and thus worthy of respect.

Mages – even reckless ones – don't take spirits lightly. When a spirit character appears, the other characters ought to show it some respect. This doesn't mean cowering in the spirit's presence, although certain godlings should certainly earn that kind of reaction. It does mean, though, that the characters will take that spirit seriously... and, by extension, the players should as well. Mocking Thor to his face isn't just a great way to get a lightning-bolt colonoscopy – it's also a great way to wreck the mood in what should be a potent moment of your chronicle.

With just a bit of imagination, creativity, and respect, the presence of an Umbrood entity can mark a powerful moment in your **Mage** chronicle. The ***Inhuman Entities*** entry in **Chapter Seven** (p. 356) features suggestions about the motivations and roleplaying involved in an Umbrood character. So if you're a Storyteller, invest your spirit with weird quirks of atmosphere and behavior; if you're a player, go along with that as well, bringing your own imagination to the game when describing the reactions of your character in the presence of the Sacred Other – a being who could be your ally, enemy, or god.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Chapter Ten: The Book of Magick

You have escaped the cage. Your wings are open. Now fly.
– Jeddaludin Rumi

Six of Pentacles

Associations: ***Exchange of energies; expression and expanse; practicality; reciprocation; vanity; self-centeredness; a tendency to go to extremes...***

I call it The Look.

One long Look in a person's eyes, and I can tell you more or less what he's thinking. Read whether or not he's feeding me a line. Maybe even rattle him enough to get him to scurry off and go bother someone else.

Or I can seduce him. Dangle him by a little strand of Will, like a spider over the candle-flame I've lit just to see him squirm. I can make him believe in me, fear me, trust and even worship me. If I really want to get vicious, I could even kill him with a long and nasty glare.

That's no easy trick. I've been studying The Look for years. Reading dusty old books, practicing new variations, honing my Will until I can reach into a person's soul just by looking at his eyes.

Everything from modern psychology to Left-Hand Tantra to medieval French Black Magic has gone into The Look. When I use it, I breathe softly and focus everything I have through an invisible tunnel of concentrated Will. The Look rides up from the base of my spine, gathering energy as it hits each chakra and draws solidity from the way I stand and shift my body weight. I feel it vibrate in my bones, especially when I'm about to do something seriously dramatic with The Look.

This isn't just focus, although that's involved in The Look, of course. It's something I could not explain unless you had the kind of background I have, with the ability to know that there's more going in inside our skins than simple science would have you believe.

The Look, more than anything else, is POWER.

I've worked hard for that power. But if you're nice, I can share it with you.

What's my price? Funny you should ask…

An Extension of the Self

Magick is an extension of the mage.

Various mystics and authorities can argue about that point until the sun goes cold, but in **Mage: The Ascension**, the magick your character *does* is an extension of the person your character *is*.

The ultimate irony of the Ascension War is that everyone's basically doing the same thing, yet they're killing one another over their impression of how and why they do it. In game terms, all mages use the same rules. The *characters* don't see it that way, but the *players* recognize that fact.

Mage's magick system allows both the player and the character to invent spells to suit the occasion. Although pre-

To Be Clear About All This...

This ***Book of Magick*** is pretty huge. Thankfully, it's not essential to read and master this entire chapter before you play **Mage**. Folks who simply want to sling spells around can stick to ***Casting Magick***, the ***Charts***, ***The Spheres***, and ***Focus and the Arts***. Everything beyond those sections details the various elements of **Mage** magick, its rules, and the results it can have within your game. Although a Storyteller should have a working familiarity with these rules, the players don't need to know it all.

Also, please remember ***The Golden Rule*** from **Chapter Eight**. These systems are guidelines. Alter them if you see fit, and remember that there's usually more than one way to cast a spell.

Disambiguation

Just to keep things clear...

- The word *you* can apply to both the player and the character.
- The word *mage* hereby applies to all characters who employ Sphere-based magick, regardless of their practices or affiliation.
- The word *magick* hereby applies to making things happen by using the Spheres. Certain characters don't consider what they're doing to be magick, but for clarity's sake we'll use that word throughout this chapter.

Helpful Terms

(*Capitalization as presented below.*)

- **Arete:** The Trait rolled to cast an *Effect*. **Enlightenment** is the same Trait by a different name.
- **Sphere:** One of the nine Traits that define what a mage can do with *magick*.
- **Magick:** Freeform reality alteration; done with *Spheres* and *Arete*.
- **Effect:** Game term for the effect you have on reality when you use magick to make things happen.
- **working:** Another name for an Effect; also, **spell**.
- **rote:** A pre-prepared Effect; called an **Adjustment** or **Procedure** by the Technocracy.
- **focus:** Game term that summarizes the belief, practice, and tools that a **Mage** character uses in order to craft Effects.
- **Paradox:** The reality backlash associated with Sphere-based magick.
- **Pattern:** A material substance, filled with Quintessence energy.
- **Pattern Arts:** The Spheres of *Forces*, *Life*, and *Matter*, which can create, adjust, and alter physical Patterns. Spirit is an "unofficial" Pattern Art which does not deal in physical materials or elements.
- **Quintessence:** The energy that creates and fuels all things.
- **conjunctional Effect:** An Effect that uses two or more Spheres, combining their powers in order to do something that neither Sphere can accomplish on its own.
- **coincidental magick:** An Effect that an average person would consider possible within the prevailing beliefs. ***Examples:*** Using a GPS to find something, making a lucky guess about something you shouldn't be able to know, employing karate to bust a hole in a wall, etc.
- **vulgar magick:** An Effect that the average person would consider impossible by the prevailing beliefs. ***Examples:*** Turning into a housecat, stepping out of thin air, snapping your fingers to make someone's bones snap too, etc.

prepared spells – often called *rotes* – certainly exist, the basis for the following rules is simple: *create the spell you need from the things your character would do.*

This chapter, then, explains how and why those rule systems work.

Four Questions at the Core

Despite a bewildering array of terms and circumstances, you can boil the essence of **Mage** magick down to four simple questions:

What do I WANT to do, and HOW will I do it?

Can I use what I KNOW to get what I WANT?

Did I succeed or not? And...

What happens either way?

Everything else in this chapter helps provide you with the answers.

Cutting to the Chase

Mage's freeform magick system can seem confusing both in and out of game. As a result, this chapter will be as straightforward as possible. The metaphysical *blahblahblah* can be found in **Chapters One** and **Two**. Like the previous two chapters, this Book of Magick deals with rules systems and their practical applications in your game. Let the characters argue about the poetry while the players have a blast.

On that note, the following systems have been left as generic as possible. A Hermetic, a Progenitor, a Batini, and an orphan all use the same rules, and this text favors those rules, not the methods that different mages employ. (For details about those methods, see the section regarding ***Focus and the Arts.***)

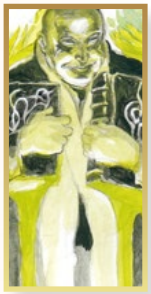
For easy reference, we've divided up this chapter according to certain topics:

- **Part I: Casting Magick** (pp. 500-510) covers the rolls you make and the Traits you employ when your character casts magickal Effects. This section also features **Magickal Reference Charts** (pp. 502-510), which lay out the material for quick and easy reference.
- **Part II: The Spheres** (pp. 511-528) summarizes what each Rank of a Sphere can do.
- **Part III: Casting Magick, Step by Step** (pp. 528-547) details each element involved in the casting of magick. You won't need to deal with each element every time you cast a spell. When you need them, however, you can find them here.
- **Part IV: The Paradox Effect** (pp. 547-553) shows how things can go wrong for your mage, extending into the related section dealing with...
- **Part V: Quiet** (pp. 554-561), which deals with the insidious effects of metaphysical insanity.
- **Part VI: Examples in Play** (pp. 561-565) provides a host of examples of the preceding rules in action.

- **Part VII: Focus and the Arts** (pp. 565-600) offers an array of options for your character's personal approach to magick.
- **Part VIII: Adjustments, Procedures, and Rotes** (pp. 601-611) presents a handful of sample spells.
- **Part X: Reality Zones** (pp. 611-617) explore the cultural and geographical flexibility of coincidence and vulgarity.

For the sake of clarity and easy access, certain important rules and charts have been repeated throughout this chapter. That way, you don't need to dig through the entire chapter to find *that one reference you need* in the middle of your game.

Part I: Casting Magick



The key to **Mage**'s magick system is this: *every mage does as he or she Wills*. Although World of Darkness mages *do* use spells, tools, Procedures, rotes, and rituals, the things they do with those instruments change reality in accordance with the individual mage's desires. That's why we put that contentious (some say pretentious) "k" at the end of the word: because each mage changes the world in his or her own way, and that's a bit more significant than simple "magic."

From a gaming standpoint, **Mage**'s magick system is freeform, based upon what your character knows, needs, and believes about herself. The Spheres provide a blueprint, and focus provides the toolkit, but each character – and each player – is ultimately an architect, building things to suit individual desires and abilities.

That's true even for the simplest Rank 1 perception Effects. You could have three Virtual Adepts using the same Effect in three different ways: one might activate a scanning app on his cell phone; the second could close her eyes, do some three-part yoga breathing, and extend her senses outward; and the third takes a few hits off a joint, open his eyes and sees deeper than the usual levels of human perception. In game terms, all three mages belong to the same group and yet perform the same Effect in their own way – the *rules* are the same but the *roleplaying* is unique. The ways in which you make your character's magick happen depend on the way you want to play that character and the ways in which you see that person meeting their immediate needs.

Here's How You Do It

Okay, so how, in game terms, do I cast a spell?

- **Step One – Effect:** Based on your character's abilities and needs, decide what you want to do and how you want to do it. This is called the *Effect*: the thing you want to accomplish with your magick.
- **Step Two – Ability:** Based on your mage's *focus* and *Spheres*, figure out if you can create the Effect you want to create... and if so, how your character will make it happen in story terms.
- **Step Three – Roll:** Roll one die for every dot in your Arete Trait. The difficulty depends upon the Effect you're trying to use; whether it's *vulgar* or *coincidental*; and whether or not someone's watching you.

If you're trying to hit a target with an attack (sword, gun, fireball, etc.), then roll the appropriate attack roll. For details, see ***Combat*** in **Chapter Nine**, pp. 409-457.

- **Step Four – Results:** The number of successes that you roll determines whether or not you succeed. If you fall short of your goal, you may roll again on subsequent turns in order to get more successes. (See ***Rituals, Rolls, and Extended Successes,*** pp. 538-542.) If you fail, the Effect fizzles out. And if you botch, bad things happen.

Those are the basics. ***Part III: Casting Magick, Step by Step*** follows this process through each stage, and the rest of this chapter explains the details.

Consequences and Paradox

Even if you succeed, you might still get *Paradox*: the consequence that comes about when you impose your view of reality upon the reality that already exists. Although mages dispute what Paradox means and why it works the way it works (see **Chapters One** and **Two** for details), in game terms, Paradox is simple: it's what happens when you push reality too far.

We'll go into the various effects of Paradox later in this chapter. For right now, just remember that every time you use magick to rearrange reality, you risk having reality rearrange your character's face. That's the cost of magick in the World of Darkness. Your mage has incredible potential, but he must be cautious about what he does with it.

In **Mage**, Paradox can strike when your character does something flashy, big, and sudden. Essentially, he pushes too hard against established reality, so reality pushes back. For that reason, you can get Paradox even when your Arete roll succeeds. And so, when you decide upon an Effect in ***Step One***, remember the potential for Paradox. Be subtle and clever when you can... and when you *have* to go for the big, flashy Effect, accept the fact that you'll be paying for it later.

The following charts and tables show you what you need to know when you're using magick in your game. For explanations of the various elements of magick and their associated rules, see the sections following these charts.

Casting Magickal Effects

All elements described below are detailed between **pp. 528-547**.

Step One - Effect: What Do You Want to Do, and How?

- What Effect are you trying to accomplish?
- Which Spheres are you using?

Step Two - Ability: Can You Do It?

- How does your character focus belief and practice into making it happen?
- Which tools and/ or rituals are you using?
- How long does it take?
- Is what you're doing vulgar or coincidental?
- Are any allies assisting you?
- Do you have any mundane skills that might help?

Step Three - Roll: Are You Successful?

- Roll your Arete/ Enlightenment versus appropriate difficulty (minimum difficulty is 3):
  - ***Coincidental:*** Difficulty = highest Sphere + 3
  - ***Vulgar Without Witnesses:*** Difficulty = highest Sphere + 4
  - ***Vulgar With Witnesses:*** Difficulty = highest Sphere + 5
- Add or subtract modifiers (maximum +3/ -3).
- If you need to hit your target, roll appropriate combat Traits.
- Spend Quintessence and/ or Willpower (if desired).
- Check the number of your successes.
- Do you need to roll more successes?
- Repeat for extended rituals/ rolls.

Step Four - Results: What Happens?

- What sorts of results did your magick have? (Damage, Duration, apparent effects, etc.)
- Did someone dodge, soak, resist, or use countermagick against your Effect? If so, remove the successes they rolled from your own successes.
- Did you succeed? If so, determine its results. (Take Paradox if required.)
- Did you fail? If so, Effect fizzles. (Take Paradox.)
- Did you botch? If so, take Paradox as below:
  - ***Coincidental Botch:*** Gain one point of Paradox per dot in the highest Sphere used.
  - ***Vulgar Without Witnesses Botch:*** Gain one point of Paradox + one point per dot in the highest Sphere.
  - ***Vulgar With Witnesses Botch:*** Gain two points of Paradox + two points per dot in the highest Sphere.

  (Paradox has different rules in **Mage Revised**; see the ***Paradox Points Generated chart***.)
- Did you get more than five points of Paradox? If so, Storyteller may roll for backlash.

Magickal Reference Charts

Base Casting Roll

Effect is...	Difficulty
Coincidental	Highest Sphere + 3
Vulgar Without Witnesses	Highest Sphere + 4
Vulgar With Witnesses	Highest Sphere + 5

Paradox Points Generated

On a Success	
Coincidental	None
Vulgar	One point
On a Botch	
Coincidental	One per dot in highest Sphere
Vulgar Without Witnesses	One + one per dot in highest Sphere
Vulgar With Witnesses	Two + two per dot highest Sphere

For optional Reckoning metaplot rules, see **p. 550**.

Magickal Feats

Base Successes

Feat	Suggested Successes
Simple Feat	*One*
(Enhancing your perceptions, lighting a candle, changing hair color, shielding your mind)	
Standard Feat	*Two*
(Healing yourself, conjuring a small fire, altering your shape, influencing someone's mood with Mind magick)	
Difficult Feat	*Three*
(Healing aggravated damage, conjuring a fireball, transforming yourself into a radically different shape, reading or affecting someone else's mind)	
Impressive Feat	*Four*
(Growing or regenerating limbs, conjuring a firestorm, transforming someone else into a different shape, controlling someone else's mind)	
Mighty Feat	*Five to Ten*
(Creating simple life-forms, blowing down walls, conjuring strange entities, commanding a mob)	
Outlandish Feat	*10-20*
(Creating complex life-forms, blowing up buildings, summoning Otherworldly creatures, turning a mob into your personal zombie squad)	
Godlike Feat	*20 and beyond*
(Rewriting your own Pattern permanently, incinerating cities, conjuring monstrous hordes, enslaving hundreds of people)	

Notes

Personal Effects typically require only *one* success.

Effects that affect someone or something else require at least *two* successes.

World-altering Effects tend to require at least *five* successes and go upward from there.

Damage *or* Duration for these feats (not both at once) are based upon the number of successes rolled, as per the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***. If you chose Damage, then Duration is instant. If you choose Duration, then Damage is zero.

Additional Damage, Targets, or Duration may be purchased under the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule***, below.

If you wish to add to the Effect's Damage, Targets, or Duration before you make the roll, figure out how many additional successes you would need, declare them to the Storyteller, and then roll the total amount (that is, the Base + additional successes).

Magickal Difficulty Modifiers

Activity	Difficulty Modifier
Tools and Rituals	
Using a personalized instrument	-1
Using a unique instrument	-1
Using a unique *and* specialized instrument	-2 (total)
Working with unfamiliar instruments	+2/ +1
Working without usual instruments	+3
Using instruments when you don't need to	-1
Using personal item from target (sympathetic magick)	-1 to -3
Appropriate Resonance (personal, instrument, ritual, or Tass)	-1
Opposed Resonance (personal, instrument, ritual, or Tass)	+1
Manipulating Mythic Threads/ hypernarrative	-1
Time and Effort	
Spending Quintessence	-1 per point, max. -3
Spending extra time (per additional turn each roll; max. -3)	-1
Fast-casting	+1
Turning time backwards	+3
General Circumstances	
Researches lore about subject before using magick	-1 to -3
Near a Node	-1 to -3
Distant or hidden target or subject	+1
Juggling several Effects at once	+1 per two Effects
Mage distracted	+1 to +3
Mage in conflict with Avatar	+1 to +3
Domino Effect	+1 per two coincidences after first; see **p. 539.**
Outlandish to godlike feat	+1 to +3

Notes

Maximum net modifier +3 or -3.

Minimum difficulty 3, maximum difficulty 10. If you employ the ***Thresholds*** option, max difficulty is 9; in the latter case, extra modifiers add to threshold, requiring one additional success per +1 difficulty modifier.

Modifiers that would take the difficulty above 10 add additional successes at a one-to-one ratio; a +3 modifier to difficulty 10, for example, would demand at least three successes.

If you use both the threshold option *and* modifiers that take the difficulty above 10, then each additional +1 difficulty over 9 demands an extra success. A +3 modifier to difficulty 9 would require at least three successes.

Degrees of Success

- **Botch:** Character makes a critical mistake, wasting the Effect and all associated efforts. Mage gets Paradox points based upon the Spheres and level of vulgarity involved.
- **Total Failure:** No successes. Effect falls short. Mage can try again at +1 difficulty.
- **Partial Success:** Player scores roughly half of the ***Suggested Successes***, giving imperfect results. Mage can keep going, at +1 difficulty.
- **Success:** Player scores at least 100% of the ***Suggested Successes***. Effect goes as planned.
- **Extraordinary Success:** Player scores at least three successes above the ***Suggested Successes***. Mage enjoys some bonus – extra Damage or Duration, high-quality item, loyal spirit, etc. – to be decided at Storyteller's option based upon nature of the Effect.

Correspondence Sphere Ranges

Successes	Range	Connection
One	Line of sight	Body sample
Two	Very familiar	Close possession or companion
Three	Familiar	Possession or casual friend
Four	Visited once	Casual acquaintance or object used once
Five	Described location	Briefly touched or met object or person
Six+	Anywhere on Earth	No connection

Base Damage or Duration

Successes	Damage	Duration
One	None	One turn
Two	Two levels	One scene
Three	Six levels	One day
Four	Eight levels	One story
Five	Ten levels	Six months
Six+	Number of Successes x 2	Storyteller's option

Notes

Damage also reflects the number of health levels healed by the Life Sphere, or the points of Quintessence channeled by the Prime Sphere.

To preserve game balance, the Storyteller may choose to cap damage at 20 health levels (10 successes, or nine successes for Forces Sphere attacks).

Magickal Damage

- **Bashing Damage:** Mind Sphere Effects.
- **Lethal Damage:** Most other Sphere Effects.
- **Aggravated Damage:** Any Sphere when charged with Prime 2 and a point of Quintessence.

  Fire or electrical Forces Effects.

  Vulgar Entropy-, Life- or Prime-based Effects that directly disrupt the target's Pattern.

Correspondence and Time inflict no damage unless they're combined with other Spheres.

The Forces Sphere adds one automatic success to Damage.

Entropy inflicts damage only through indirect attacks until Rank 4; after that, damage is aggravated.

Teleportation Locations

Successes	Range
One	Within immediate perception
Two	Very familiar place (home, Sanctum, etc.)
Three	Familiar/ Just saw it recently
Four	Visited briefly
Five	Heard or saw it described
Six+	Teleporting totally blind

Optional Dividing Successes Rule

Under this *optional rule*, each additional success beyond the ***Base Successes*** may be spent on one of the following bonuses:

Targets: One additional target for each success beyond the Base.

Damage: Two additional levels of damage for each success beyond the Base.

Duration: Add one level of duration for each success beyond the Base.

One success = one scene

Two successes = one day

Three successes = one story

Four successes = six months

Five successes = Storyteller's option

Six+ successes = permanent (at Storyteller's option)

"I Disbelieve!"

Only vs. mental illusions. Roll Willpower, five successes or more.

Believability	Difficulty
No fucking way!	3
Hard to swallow	4
Implausible	5
Possible	6
Probable	7
Likely	8
Too damned likely!	9

To spot flaws in "physical" illusions, roll Perception + Alertness as described above.

Feats of Illusion

Successes	Illusion
One	Simple, one sensation (sight, sound, scent, etc.)
Two	Simple and moving, one sensation
Three	Complex and stationary, or simple and moving (two sensations)
Four	Complex and moving (several sensations)
Five	Complex and reflexive (multiple sensations)
Six+	Complex and interactive (full sensations)

Notes

Types of Illusions

- Mental illusions = Mind 2+ (only in target's mind; usually coincidental)
- "Physical" illusions = Forces 2+/ Prime 4+ (visible to all witnesses; manipulate elemental forces to manifest sensory components)
- Immersive illusions = Forces 4+/ Prime 4+ ("holodeck" level of apparent reality)

Damage & Duration

Illusions don't normally inflict damage unless "damage levels" are purchased as described below. Illusions *may* indirectly lead witness into dangerous situations, as described under ***Environmental Hazards***.

- Mind = bashing damage
- Mind 3/ Life 3 = aggravated damage
- Forces = bashing or lethal, depending upon elements involved

Default Duration is one scene. Additional levels of Duration, or "damage levels" of two dice of damage, may be purchased for one additional success, each level, above the Base. One day + two dice of damage, for example, would require two additional successes.

Gauntlet Ratings

Area	Difficulty [#1]	Successes Needed
Node	3	One
Deep Wilderness	5	Two
Rural Countryside	6	Three
Most Urban Areas	7	Four
Downtown	8	Five
Technocracy Lab [#2]	9	Five

Notes

An area's Gauntlet Difficulty may vary with time and circumstances; a dark alley on Halloween night might have a Gauntlet of 6, whereas a rigidly cultivated garden at noon could have a Gauntlet of 8.

#1 = If using the Technocratic victory metaplot, add +1 to the Gauntlet Rating when in industrial-culture zones, whether or not the Avatar Storm is still in force.

#2 = Treat as a Node when using Dimensional Science.

Time Sphere Timelines

Successes	Effect Timespan
One	Within a year
Two	Five years
Three	20 years
Four	50 years
Five	100 years
Six +	500 years
10+	1000 years or more

Notes

Timespan limits apply only to looking or reaching through time, not to the duration of a given Effect.

Feats of Time Magick

Successes	Feat
Three	Step out of time/ minor aging (Difficult feat)
Four	Take one other character out of time/ noticeable aging (Impressive feat)
Five	Take several characters, or a roughly 10' x 10' area, out of time/ severe aging (Mighty feat)
Eight	Take larger area (25' x 25') out of time/ age to decrepitude (Mighty feat)
10-20	Take an even larger area out of time/ age to brink of destruction (Outlandish feat)
20+	Freeze or isolate very large and dynamic area or event/ age out of existence (Godlike feat)

Notes

Feats that rewind time add +3 to the difficulty.

Feats that affect time beyond personal perceptions (viewing through time, for instance) are almost always vulgar magick.

Paradox Backlash Roll

Storyteller rolls one die for each point of Paradox in character's current Paradox pool, against difficulty 6.

Successes	Effects of Discharge
Botch	All Paradox points discharge harmlessly.
No successes	No effects, but no Paradox points discharge.
1-5	One point of Paradox discharged per success. Mage also suffers one level of *bashing* damage per success and acquires a trivial ***Paradox Flaw***.
6-10	One point of Paradox discharged per success. Mage also suffers a Burn of one level of bashing damage per success or acquires a minor Paradox Flaw.
11-15	Usual Paradox point-discharge, as well as a Burn of *lethal* damage or *one* of the following effects: a significant Paradox Flaw, a ***Paradox Spirit*** visitation, or a mild ***Quiet***.
16-20	Usual Paradox point-discharge, as well as a Burn of lethal damage and one point of ***permanent Paradox*** or *two* of the following effects: a severe Paradox Flaw; a Paradox Spirit visitation; a moderate Quiet; or banishment to a Paradox Realm.
21+	Usual Paradox discharge, plus a Burn of *aggravated* damage (one health level for every two successes) *and* either two points of permanent Paradox, one drastic Paradox Flaw, a Paradox Spirit visitation, a severe Quiet, or banishment to a ***Paradox Realm***.

Levels of Quiet

Level	Paradox Discharged	Delusions or Disassociation
1	1-3	Minor quirks or occasional delusions; mage begins to manifest odd behavior and minor disassociation from his baseline reality.
2	4-6	Delusions and disconnection become more severe; mage perceives things that no one else can see, starts denying the experiences of other people, and begins to behave irrationally even by Awakened standards.
3	7-10	Mage's senses backfire, creating blindness (real or conceptual), vivid hallucinations, and erratic – perhaps dangerous – behavior. Hobgoblins might appear, manifesting the mage's delusions in ways that other people can perceive.
4	11-15	Mage either gets trapped in a mindscape of his own design, or else behaves so irrationally that he becomes a danger to himself and everyone nearby.
5	16-20	Mage either drops into total catatonia or takes on many of the characteristics of a Marauder but without immunity to Paradox.
6	21+	Mage goes Marauder and becomes a Storyteller character.

Types of Quiet

Level	Denial	Madness	Morbidity
1	Stubbornness, minor projection	Minor hallucinations	Attraction to death and decay
2	Selective perceptions, hypocritical behavior	Frequent delusions, mood swings	Fixation with mortality
3	Irrational behavior, literal blindness to denied subjects	Wild hallucinations, sensory overload	Bloodlust and macabre behavior
4	Deadly fanaticism	Mindscape or constant hobgoblins	Violent sociopathy
5	Fanatical drone	Catatonia or dementia	Sadistic killer
6	Marauder	Marauder	Marauder

Mindscape Rolls

Difficulty for all is Quiet Level + 3

Attempted Task	Dice Pool
Meditate into mindscape	Perception + Meditation
Meditate into Demesne	Perception + Demesne
Reduce time in mindscape	Wits + Enigmas or Perception + Demesne
Communicate to outside	Willpower

Aura Colors and Textures

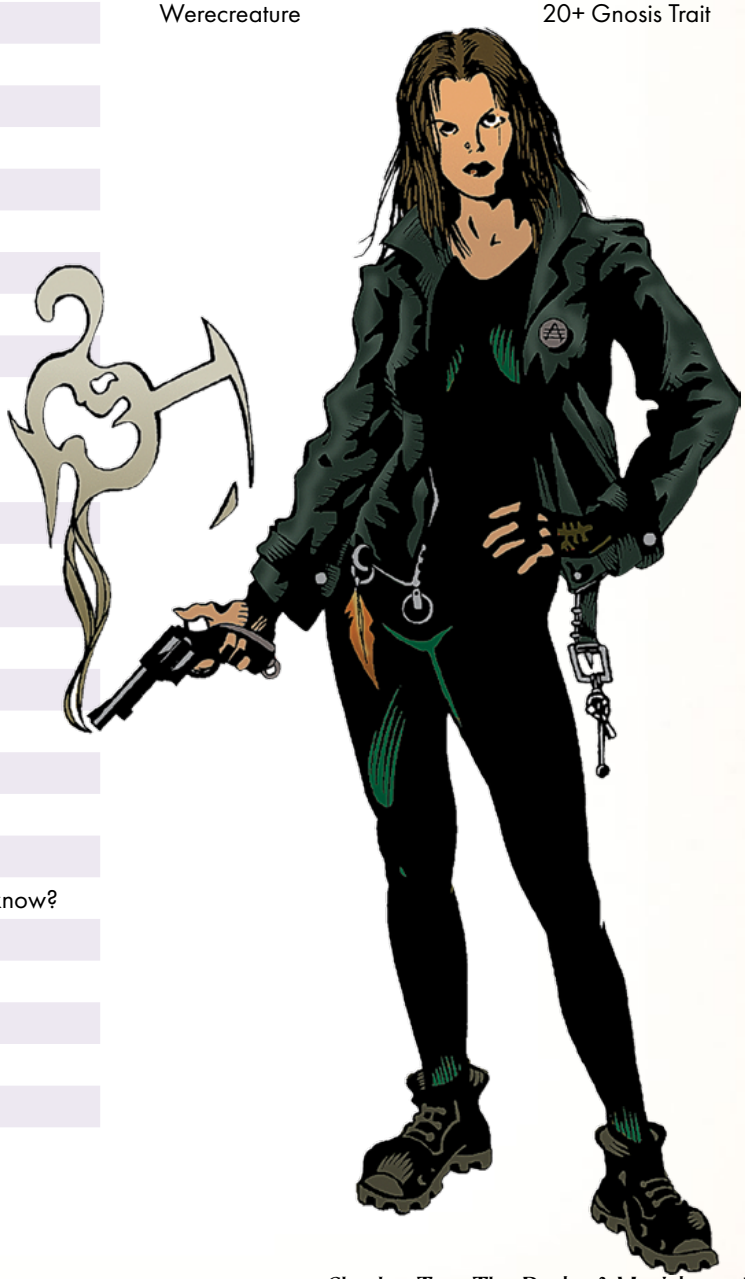
Emotional State	Color
Bitterness	Brown
Calm, Devotion	Blue
Change, Transformation	Violet
Compassion, Affection	Pink
Empathy, Sensitivity	Green
Enthusiastic, Idealistic	Yellow
Fear	Orange
Fury	Dark Red
Pain, Hatred	Black
Passion, Anger	Red
Sadness	Silver
Uncertainty, Depression	Gray

Condition	Texture
Arousal	Bright
Corruption	Pulsating
Dementia, Quiet	Flickering
Excitement	Crackling
Faerie	Rainbow highlights
Marauder	Hypnotic, swirling
Fanatical	Intense colors
Ghost	Weak, faded
Magic/ Mage	Sparkling
Nephandus	Wouldn't you like to know?
Sickness, Dying	Fading
Spirituality, Awareness	Gold
Truth, Purity, Faith	White
Vampire	Pale
Werecreature	Bright, vibrant

Quintessence Amounts

Per body, in points, that can be extracted with Prime Sphere Effects.

Subject	Quintessence Points
Small animal (bird, cat, fox)	5
Large animal (wolf, horse, human)	10
Powerful animal (tiger, elephant, whale)	15-25
Changeling	20-30
Mage	10-30 (depending on Quintessence Trait)
Spirit	Essence Trait
Vampire	10+ Blood Pool Trait
Werecreature	20+ Gnosis Trait



Common Magickal Effects

Notes

Entries reflect whichever Spheres apply to the feat in question. Transforming an object into air or fire would be Forces 3/ Matter 2, whereas liquefying it would simply be Matter 2.

Many Sphere listings feature two Sphere levels. The first lets a mage work on herself, and the second (in parentheses) allows her to work on others. Changing your own shape, for example, requires Life 4, but changing someone else's shape demands (Life 5).

Other workings begin small but then escalate their effects with higher Sphere levels; these workings have been marked with a "+."

Entries with [brackets] have several possibilities, which depend upon the Sphere used in the Effect. For example, [appropriate elemental Sphere] could mean Forces, Life, or Matter, depending upon the element the mage is working with.

Given the flexibility of the Spheres, there may be several options when performing a particular feat. The methods listed below are simply the *easiest* ways to cast a spell, not necessarily the *only* ways to do it. Common alternatives for the same task are separated by semi-colons.

Body Magick

Adapt to Environment	Life 2 (3)
Animate Corpse or Parts	Life 2/ Prime 2
Animate Bones & Remains	Matter 2/ Prime 2
Cause/ Cure Disease	Life 2 (3)
Cosmetic Alteration	Life 2 (3)
Create Body	Life 2 (simple) or 5 (complex)/ Prime 2
Duplicate Body	Life 5/ Prime 2
Grow New Limbs or Other Features	Life 3 (4)
Heal/ Harm Living Being	Life 2 (3)
Heal/ Harm Fae	Life 3/ Mind 3
Heal/ Harm Vampire	Life 3/ Matter 2
Heal/ Harm Werecreature	Life 3/ Spirit 2
Increase Physique/ Traits	Life 3 (4)
Increase/ Reduce Speed	Time 3
Revive Recently Dead	Life 4/ Spirit 4/ Prime 3
Rot Body	Entropy 4; or Life 4
Shapeshift	Life 4 (5)
Sleep Spell	Mind 2 (suggest sleep); or Mind 4, Life 3, or both (compel instant slumber)
Soak Aggravated Damage	Life 3
Transform into Element	Life 3/ [appropriate elemental Sphere] 3+ (Life 4/ 3+[appropriate Sphere])

Fate & Fortune

Alter Probability	Entropy 2+
Bless/ Curse	Entropy 3/ Life 3; or Prime 4+
Cause Decay	Entropy 3+
Spot Weakness	Entropy 1

Crafting Wonders

Artifact	Prime 4 + [Spheres in Wonder's Effects]
Device	Prime 4 + [Spheres in Wonder's Effects]
Fetish	Spirit 4 (to bind unwilling spirit); or Prime 4 (willing spirit)
Periapt/ Matrix	Matter 5 (inanimate); or Life 5 (living) + Prime 3
Talisman	Prime 4 + [Spheres in Wonder's Effects]
Trinket	Prime 2 (to consecrate), or [Spheres used to craft Trinket's special properties]

For details, see ***Appendix II,* (pp. 651-653)**.

Illusions (see Feats of Illusion chart)

Mental Illusions	Mind 2+
Mental Illusions That Inflict Damage	Mind 3+; or Mind 3+/ Life 3+
"Physical" Illusions	Forces 2+/ Prime 2
Immersive Illusions	Forces 4+/ Mind 4/ Prime 4+

Spirit Powers

Awaken Object's Spirit	Spirit 3
Bless/ Curse	Entropy 3+; or Prime 5
Command Spirit	Mind 4/ Spirit 4
Conjure Spirit	Spirit 3
Create Fetish	see ***Crafting Wonders***
Drain Spirit's Essence	Prime 4/ Spirit 4
Harm Ghost	Entropy 3/ Prime 2; or Spirit 3
Harm Spirit	Spirit 3 (acts like Life 3)
Open/ Close Gateway	Spirit 4
See Spirits	Spirit 1
Speak to Spirits	Spirit 2
Step Sideways	Spirit 3
Touch Spirit	Spirit 2

Objects & Elements

Call Storm	Forces 4+/ Prime 2
Conjure Element	Forces 3/ Prime 2 (fire, wind); or Matter 3/Prime 2 (earth, metal, water); or Life 3/ Prime 2 (living wood)
Conjure New Object	Matter 3+/ Prime 2
Conjure Physical Illusion	Forces 2+/ Prime 2
Direct Existing Elements	Forces 2+
Disintegrate an Object	Entropy 3/ Time 3; or Matter 3
Enchant Object/ Organism	see ***Crafting Wonders***
Invisibility/ Silence Field	Forces 2
Invisibility on Living Being	Forces 2/ Life 2
Consecrate/ Harden/ Perfect an Object	Matter 3+; or Prime 2
Levitation/ Flying	Forces 2+; or Correspondence 3/ Life 2; or Matter 2
Object Inflicts/ Resists Agg. Damage	Prime 2
Speed/ Slow Velocity	Forces 2+
Transform Objects	Matter 2+/ [appropriate Sphere] 2
Transform Forces	Forces 3+/ [appropriate Sphere] 2

Time & Distance

Affect Distant Object/ Being	Correspondence 2+
Aging/ Reversing Age*	Time 3+/Life 4 (living being) or Matter 2 (object)
Conjure Earthly Being	Correspondence 4/ Life 2
Create Multiple Images	Correspondence 3; or Forces 2+/ Prime 2
Create Multiple Objects	Correspondence 5/ Matter 3/ Prime 2
Open Gateway Between Locations	Correspondence 4
Rewind Time	Time 3*
Set Time Trigger	Time 4
Speed/ Slow Time	Time 3
Teleport	Correspondence 3 (4)
Time Travel*	Time 5
Ward/ Ban	Correspondence 2+/ [appropriate Sphere] 2

* Turning back time adds +3 difficulty and is always vulgar.

Perception & Psychic Powers

Astral Projection	Mind 4+
Astral Body of Light	Mind 4+/ Spirit 3/ Prime 2
Clairvoyance	Correspondence 2; or Mind 3/ Correspondence 2
Conceal/ Alter Aura	Mind 1 or Prime 2
Conceal Avatar	Spirit 2/ Mind 1
Conceal Thoughts	Mind 1
Conjure Mental Illusions	Mind 2+
Enter a Dream	Mind 3
Influence Mood	Mind 2
Influence Subconscious	Mind 3+
Mind Control	Mind 4
Prophecy/ Hindsight	Mind 2/ Time 2; or Time 2
Psychic Pain Blast	Mind 3; or Mind 3/ Life 3 for agg. Damage
Scramble Thoughts	Mind 3
See Auras	Mind 1; or Spirit 1
See Avatar	Mind 3/ Prime 2/ Spirit 1
See Through Another's Eyes	Mind 3
See Through Mental Illusions	Mind 4
Sense Energies	[appropriate Sphere] 1
Share Perceptions	Mind 2/ [appropriate Sphere] 1
Shield Mind	Mind 1 (2)
Telepathy	Mind 3
Telekinesis	Forces 2+
Translate Languages	Mind 3; Mind 3/ Forces 2 to translate language so that other people can understand it too

Quintessence Energy

Absorb Quintessence	Prime 3
Channel Quintessence	Prime 3
Create New Node	Prime 5
Create Quintessence Weapon	Prime 3*
Destroy by Draining Quintessence	Prime 4 (object) or Prime 5 (creature)
Drain Node	Prime 4
Drain Quintessence	Prime 3
Employ Periapt	Prime 2, or Correspondence 2/ Prime 2 (Avatar rating to use reflexively)
Enchant Weapon/ Armor	Prime 2
Energize Periapt	Prime 3
Fuel New Pattern	Prime 2/ appropriate Sphere
Nullify Paradox	Prime 5
Refine Tass	Prime 4
Share/ Exchange Quintessence	Prime 3
Tap Wellspring	Prime 4
Weave simple Body of Light	Prime 2 (body only – no astral travel)

See also ***Crafting Wonders*** and ***Quintessence Amounts chart.***

* Costs one Quintessence per health level inflicted.

Part II: The Spheres

To make a terrible pun of it, **Mage**'s Spheres reflect a well-rounded knowledge of nine different yet interrelated elements of reality. In story terms, these nine constructs represent a sort of "unified-field theory" of Earthly metaphysics. In game terms, they measure what your characters do and cannot do, based upon their understanding of theoretical knowledge and practical results.

Each Sphere features five different levels of progress and result. That progression is represented by the number of dots in your Sphere Trait. As detailed in **Chapter Two**, within the sidebar ***Levels of Sphere Progress and Expertise*** **(see p. 68)**, each successive level allows your mage to understand a bit more about the principles of that Sphere. As a result, he can do more things with it, adding a new level of abilities onto the previous levels of accomplishment:

- • **Rank 1: Perception** – the ability to perceive and observe the forces in question. With such basic (yet useful) understanding, a character can sense things that few mortals ever recognize.
- •• **Rank 2: Manipulation** – the ability to do small things with those forces. At this point, the mage begins to exert minor control over the phenomena she sees, and may use it to work small changes upon herself.
- ••• **Rank 3: Control** – the ability to alter reality in noticeable ways, though these are usually restricted to the mage's self. In most cases, the Sphere begins inflicting damage at this level, and allows the character to work small alterations on other characters.
- •••• **Rank 4: Command** – the ability to perform major acts of alteration through the principles of that Sphere. Generally, this level allows the mage to make significant changes to the Patterns of other characters.
- ••••• **Rank 5: Mastery** – the ability to command vast forces in connection with that element of reality. By now, the mage knows almost everything there is to know about the principles of that Sphere and can perform godlike deeds with them.

(Higher degrees of Sphere mastery might exist, but those are rare and optional so we're not exploring them in this book.)

The metaphysical principles behind those Spheres can be found in **Chapter Two**, under ***A Brief Overview of the Spheres and Their Properties***, **(pp. 67-71)**. Here, we'll deal strictly with the levels of progress and the things you can do with each level of expertise.

For easy in-game reference, each Sphere has been given an entry that details the expanding powers of that Sphere. To find out what you can do with those Spheres, especially when you combine them, see the ***Common Magickal Effects chart*** in the previous section.

The Pattern Spheres

Many entries refer to "the Pattern Spheres" – that is, Spheres that govern physical elements and materials. When a mage creates a physical force, object, or body from "nothing," that spell combines a Pattern Sphere with the raw creative energy of the Prime Sphere. The Pattern Sphere crafts the form, and the Prime Sphere supplies the energy that makes that form "real."

As noted elsewhere, those physical Pattern Spheres are *Forces* (for energies), *Life* (organic bodies), and *Matter* (inorganic materials). *Spirit* is sort of an honorary Pattern Sphere that deals only with the metaphysical essence called *ephemera*. And so, when your mage conjures fire (Forces), butterflies (Life), stones (Matter), or ephemeral weaponry (Spirit), you combine the appropriate Sphere with the Prime Sphere in order to bring such things into existence.

For details, see the entries for each Sphere in question.

Conjunctional (Combined) Sphere-Effects

As mentioned earlier, **Mage**'s various Effects come from Spheres; some employ a single Sphere, and others use a combination of Spheres. Sometimes referred to as *conjunctional Effects*, these combinations expand the potential of a single Sphere into Effects that no single Sphere could accomplish on its own.

As an example, let's say that Malcolm wants to influence someone's mood. Mind 2 alone will do that. If he wants to alter a person's body chemistry in order to induce euphoria, however, he'd need to use Life 3/ Mind 2... and if he wanted to set things up so that the body chemistry changed several hours from now, he'd need to add Time 4 to that Effect.

Again, the ***Common Magickal Effects chart*** shows you how different Spheres and their Effects can be combined to create even greater or more expansive Effects.

Locking an Effect

Normally, a lasting magickal Effect remains in the location where it was originally cast. The mage has essentially transformed that localized reality to suit his desires. Certain Effects, of course, travel because of the nature of the things they do; rumors circulate, winds and fires move, a shape-shifted character can run around, a gate leads to some other location, and so forth.

If, however, you want to cast a lingering, mobile Effect that has been integrated into *a specific Pattern* and *which involves a Sphere that is not normally related to that sort of Pattern*, then the Effect must be "locked" into the target's Pattern by a Sphere that *does* apply to that Pattern.

What does *that* mean? It's very simple: if you want to alter someone's mind, use the Mind Sphere; if you want to alter her physical body, use the Life Sphere. But if you want to use magick to build inorganic material into her body's Pattern, then you must use both Life *and* Matter; if you want to make her Pattern invisible by warping light around her body, then you must lock the Effect by using both Life *and* Forces.

Locking the Effect combines the necessary Spheres so that the magick is essentially integrated into a Pattern. And as noted earlier, the Patten Spheres are Forces, Life, and Matter. Spirit is sort of an honorary Pattern Sphere because although it deals in non-physical elements, those elements have their own kind of Pattern when they become *ephemera*. **(See Chapter Nine, p. 475.)**

Unless the subject of a locked Effect has been turned into a ***Wonder*** **(see *Crafting Wonders*, pp. 652-653, and the rules given in Appendix II)**, that Effect still expires when the Duration runs out. The lock in itself does not make an Effect permanent.

Sphere Specialties

Each of the following entries also features a selection of *specialties*. You can choose a Sphere specialty when your mage accumulates four dots in that Sphere. As with the specialties granted to Attributes and Abilities, a Sphere specialty allows you to count each 10 you roll as two successes, not just one. **(For details, see Chapter Six, p. 274.)**

At four dots, a player gets to choose one specialty, based upon the things the mage does most often with the Sphere in question. *At the Storyteller's discretion*, additional specialties can be purchased for four experience points each, *assuming that the character has spent time and effort training herself in that specialty*. You can't suddenly specialize in Shapeshifting, after all, if your character hasn't spent lots of time learning how to change her shape.

Spheres By Rote

Longtime **Mage** fans know that the previous Sphere entries ran on for four to six pages per Sphere, covering 36 pages or more. During games, those long entries could get very hard to follow, and they featured an array of Effects that were essentially one-Sphere rotes. Those Effects, in turn, proved difficult to track down, especially in the heat of a game. And so, in the interest of clarity, we're sticking to basic functionality in this **20th Anniversary Edition**.

A full presentation of the Spheres and their Effects and permutations would be far larger than any other chapter in this book. Most folks won't need such an extensive catalog of spells, especially given this book's ***Common Magickal Effects chart***. For a detailed breakdown of the many potential applications of the Spheres see the **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition** sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That? A Practical Guide to Sphere Magick**, which presents a comprehensive look at the Spheres and their associated Effects, rotes, Procedures, and so forth.

A small selection of rotes and Effects can be found in this chapter, in ***Section VIII: Adjustments, Procedures, and Rotes***, (pp. 601-611).

For more about the use of Spheres and the way in which they fit into the step-by-step process of casting magick, see ***Spheres: The Foundation of Each Effect***, (pp. 528-529).

Optional Rule: Technocratic Alternative Spheres

Three *optional* Spheres at the end of this section reflect the Technocratic refinements of three of the nine mystic Spheres, as presented in the **Revised Convention Books** for the **New World Order** (the Data Sphere, an analog of Correspondence), the **Syndicate** (Primal Utility, the hypereconomic applications of Prime), and the **Void Engineers** (Dimensional Science, the scientific perspective on Spirit).

For the most part, these optional Spheres may be purchased *ONLY* by Technocratic operatives, as these disciplines reflect the training, research, and conditioning of the Technocratic Union. The exception, Data, is based on innovations by the Virtual Adepts and has since been adopted by technomancers from all over the spectrum.

In most respects, a Technocratic Sphere functions like a mystic one. These three variants, however, have a few noticeable bonuses and limitations, which get covered in the individual entries.

A character *cannot* possess both a Technocratic Sphere and the corresponding mystic Sphere. Doing so would essentially reflect a divided perspective on Reality – believing two related yet opposed beliefs about the same thing.

That said, a character may transition from one to the other if the story supports that transition. In such cases, the character temporarily loses a dot in that Sphere until she has a chance to add one point of Arete, essentially experiencing a revelation that allows her to adapt her old expertise to her new understanding. At that point, the Sphere returns to its previous rating. The player does not have to spend extra experience points to return that Sphere to its old level, although raising it, of course, costs the usual amount of experience points.

The other Spheres – Entropy, Forces, Life, Matter, Mind, and Time – follow the same rules, regardless of a mage's affiliation. A NWO Black Suit would refer to his approach to the Mind Sphere as *Psychodynamics*, but Psychodynamics still functions, in system terms, the same way that the Mind Sphere does.

Correspondence

Connections and Dimensions

***Specialties*: Conjuration, Scrying, Gates, Warding, Teleportation**

By manipulating the ties between places, objects, and people, the Correspondence Sphere allows a mage to sidestep distances, sense things that would normally be out of range, pull objects out of thin air, levitate or fly, or connect an Effect to some other place or character. Some mages proclaim this Sphere

is proof that distance is an illusion, whereas others view it as the Art of pulling strings between different places and people.

Because this Sphere deals with space and relationships, its Effects use a special ***Correspondence Sphere Ranges chart***, found on (p. 504). Most Effects require touch or close contact, but Correspondence lets the mage reach across distances and affect hidden or faraway targets. When adding Correspondence to an Effect, use that ***Correspondence Sphere Ranges chart*** to find the connection and then exploit it. Tenuous connections require several successes, but spanning close connections is easy for a mage who understands this Art.

On its own, Correspondence allows the mage to reach across distances, even to places she cannot see or touch. At Rank 2 or higher, she can grasp items and work with them from a distance. To manipulate other objects or beings in ways other than physical contact, however, that mage must combine Correspondence with another Sphere – typically a Pattern Sphere (Forces, Life, or Matter).

When combining Correspondence with other Spheres, however, the Effect is limited – in game terms – to *the mage's Rank in the Correspondence Sphere, not to the Rank of the other Spheres involved.* A mage, for instance, who has only Correspondence 2 tries to use a Forces 3/ Correspondence 2/ Prime 2 Effect to try to start fires at a distance... except that she is limited to Forces 2, a Rank that's too low to conjure fire. In order to boost that effect, she'd need to raise her Correspondence to at least 3.

Despite its ability to warp space and distance, Correspondence deals *only with whole Patterns*, unless a target has been altered by another Pattern Sphere; Correspondence alone, for example, cannot teleport someone's head off – the mage would need to use Life magick to separate the head from its body. A gun, on the other hand, could be snatched away by a Correspondence/ Matter Effect.

Mages who specialize in Correspondence tend to have a faraway look. To them, the separations of space and form are meaningless illusions that disappear when you understand how the universe truly fits together.

For an optional Technocratic approach to Correspondence, see ***Data***, (pp. 524-525).

• Immediate Spatial Perceptions/ Landscape of the Mind

Basic spatial understanding allows a mage to sense things in her immediate vicinity even if she can't perceive them with her normal senses. Using that perception, she can estimate the distances between objects; intuitively find a direction (North, South, East, West); notice hidden objects or characters; and spot spatial instabilities – warps, anomalies, wormholes, etc. – especially the ones caused by other Correspondence Effects.

•• Sense, Touch, Thicken & Reach Through Space/ Correspondence Sensing

That mage can now extend her senses across intervening space, sensing things in other locations. Such extensions, however, leave minor ripples in space... the kind noticed by Rank 1 Correspondence. Fortunately, she can also thicken space to cover her tracks; each success used in doing so deducts one success from the roll of a character who's trying to spy on her or notice her sensory Effects.

By adding Life or Matter to Rank 2 Correspondence, the mage can grasp small items or organisms (housecat-sized or smaller) and then pull them through tiny holes in space. This lets her snatch business cards, guns, rabbits, and such from another location, apparently pulling them out of nowhere.

••• Pierce Space/ Open or Close Gates/ Co-locality Perceptions

Now the mage can tear holes in space, large enough for her to step through. These minor gates are small and temporary, but they allow that character to step from one place to another, so long as she's alone and lightly encumbered. (Teleporting large items, or while carrying heavy loads, demands Correspondence 4.) Scoping out the new location is a good idea, of course. A close, familiar destination requires fewer successes than a distant, unfamiliar one.

Using the **Co-locality Perceptions** Effect, the mage can also perceive several places at once. Those locations all appear as ghosts overlapping each other, as if they'd been layered on top of the closest location.

Also, by combining Correspondence 3 with Forces, Life, or Matter, the mage can move things around from a distance, levitating, manipulating or teleporting them without physical contact.

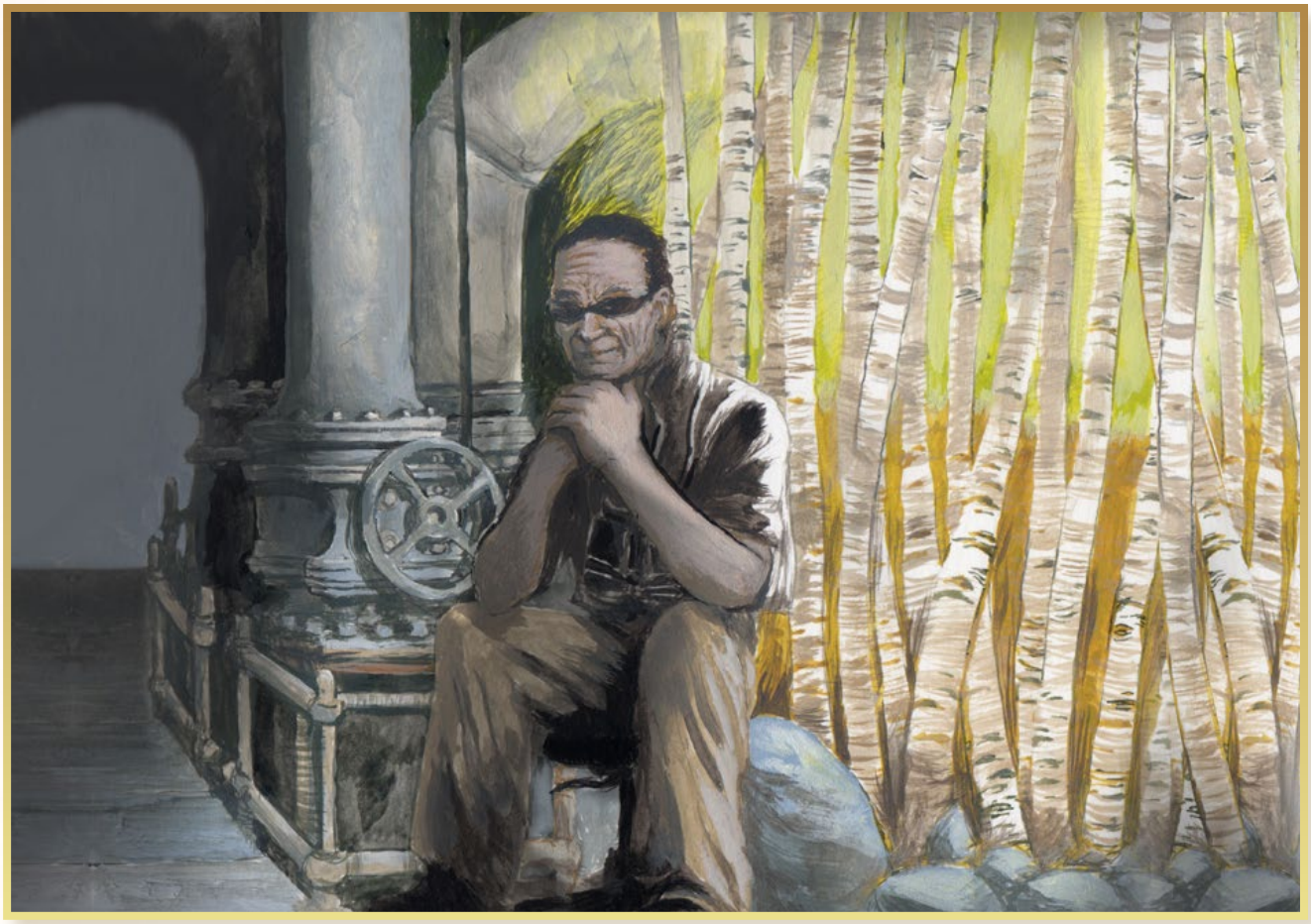
•••• Rend Space/ Ward/ Co-locate Self

Creating larger holes in space, the mage can now open permanent gates between locations (10 or more successes); isolate forces, spaces, objects, or people into their own tiny realms (by combining Correspondence 4 with Forces, Life, Mind, or Matter); and *ward* certain locations against specific Patterns (again, combining Forces, Life, Mind, or Matter with Correspondence) or Resonance energies (combining this Sphere with Prime 4). This warding effect can impede or even block the forbidden elements from crossing into, or out of, the protected space. (For extensive details about wards, see the sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That?)**

Using the **Co-location** Effect, that mage can also appear in several different places at once. To function, however, she must add Mind 1 to that Effect. Each self mirrors the original's actions unless she also adds Life 2 to that Effect, granting independence to every self.

••••• Spatial Mutation / Co-Location

Distance and dimensions become child's play to a mage at this Rank. She can distort space; alter sizes and stretch or compress objects (Matter), bodies (Life), or forces (Forces); connect different Patterns to one another across intervening space; or even superimpose places or objects on top of one another (extremely vulgar). Combining this Rank with Life 3, the mage may also expand her senses to perceive many different places at once.



Entropy

Chance and Mortality

***Specialties*: Fate, Fortune, Decay, Order, Chaos, Necromancy**

Everything is mortal. Objects, people, even concepts decay over time. When you truly understand that principle – and more, when you can influence it yourself – such knowledge brings with it a sense of liberation... a bit of sadness, of course, but also the comfort of letting go.

Controlling the energies of probability and decay, an Entropy-schooled mage can manipulate random factors, observe and influence flaws within a system, tap into the energies of the Low Umbra, induce or remove corruption, and otherwise exert his Will through the inexorable process of mortality.

This is no easy discipline. The Entropic mage assumes some of the Resonance of decay within his own Pattern, and bears the weight of mortality within his mind and soul. Still, the powers of this Sphere – though less obviously destructive than those of other Arts – give that mage subtle but pervasive control over Creation as a whole.

Unlike most other Spheres, Entropy spells don't inflict damage until Rank 4; after that, such damage is aggravated, as it breaks down the very Patterns of existence. Up until that point, Entropy helps a mage exploit or defer the effects of decay and probability... a gift that helps him use an opponent's surroundings against her even when he doesn't attack directly.

For obvious reasons, Entropy-schooled mages tend to be fatalistic, disassociated, or uncannily cheerful. To them, the saying "all things must pass" is no simple sentiment but an intrinsic fact of life.

• Sense Flaws, Fate & Fortune/ Ring of Truth

Basic Entropic understanding allows a mage to see the currents of probability, spot flaws in Patterns, and note the subtle yet telling details in a person's speech and behavior that suggest whether or not she's telling what she believes to be the truth. Although he cannot yet control such phenomena, the mage can predict dice throws, card draws, and other apparently random events; spot weak spots in objects, people, or arguments; and use those imperfect yet profound insights to his advantage.

•• Control Probability

Now the mage can control the factors he could only sense before. Pulling the strings of apparently random events,

he can influence activities and results – directing the fall of dice or cards, repeatedly hitting weak spots, and directing people and things toward a conclusion of his choice. Of course, it's easier to control small events (the winner of a horse race) than large ones (causing a six-car pileup). In game terms, large alterations demand more successes than small ones do.

••• Affect Predictable Patterns

Things eventually break down. At this Rank, the mage can control the speed at which material objects fail or decay. That's easier to do with complex machines (cars, computers) than it is with simple ones (walls, stones) – after all, more things can go wrong with complicated things.

At this Rank, the mage can also start controlling the fate and fortune of objects and people, giving them good or bad luck by controlling the probability of events around them. Again, large feats demand more successes than smaller ones.

•••• Affect Living Things

At this Rank, the mage assumes the awesome power of blessing, cursing, and conferring outright health or decay. By influencing the flow of entropy within a living body, that mage can grant outstanding vitality to, or inflict sudden disease upon, his subject. Such influence, as noted above, inflicts or heals aggravated damage and may grant long-term luck or misfortune. (Storyteller's option as to how this manifests.)

••••• Affect Thought/ Shape Memes/ Binding Oath

The most esoteric applications of Entropy allow the mage to alter *ideas*, strengthening or breaking down concepts. Although he does not affect the actual workings of consciousness, he can cause synapses to misfire (thus confusing perceptions and mental processing, inflicting penalties on an enemy's dice rolls), bind someone to an oath, or degrade the patterns of thought. By doing so, that Entropic Master can craft, perpetrate, reinforce, and undermine arguments, beliefs, and even memories.

To do such things, the Master merely speaks to, or glances at, the subject of his attention. Chaos Masters can scramble someone's perceptions with a few weird utterances, and Masters of Order can present arguments with apparently perfect logic. By offering compelling statements, the Master can create or destroy *memes* (see p. 594), thus influencing whole patterns of belief. An oath, meanwhile, ties the subject's fate to her loyalty; if she breaks the oath, then her luck goes really, *really* bad.

In game terms, such feats demand a certain number of successes. Inspiring a whim requires only one or two successes, sparking a fancy takes three, setting or undermining a conviction takes four or five successes, and setting up obsessions demands five successes or more. Such activities are usually coincidental and are typically rolled against a difficulty of the subject's Willpower +3 (threshold rules apply for Willpowers of 8, 9, or 10) if that character tries to resist the Master's influence.

Forces

Raising Storms

***Specialties*: Alchemy, Motion, Elements (any or all), Technology, Physics, Weather, Weaponry**

Although modern physics disputes the old lines between matter and energy, the venerable study of Forces transcends human politics. This Sphere commands the energies of Creation, and its specialists are among the most powerful mages alive.

On a metaphysical level, the Forces Sphere commands energetic Patterns: fire, air, momentum, gravity, radiation, light, sound, and radio waves... the kinetic elements that shape and channel Earthly forces. Quintessence flows within such Patterns, so a mage can conjure new forces simply by adding some Quintessence to "empty space." Different practices view such powers differently. Are they elemental spirits? Gods? Particles? Waves? Every Master has his or her own pet theory. In practical terms, however, this Sphere controls the Patterns of such forces – directing, transmuting, enhancing, or banishing their effects upon this world.

In game terms, Forces-based attacks inflict an additional success of damage. The nature of that damage depends upon the energies in question – see the ***Magickal Damage chart***. Simple manifestations and manipulations are limited to the lower Sphere Ranks, whereas large-scale Effects demand higher levels of expertise. Most large Effects also demand plenty of successes and can become Paradox magnets for careless mages. Masters of Forces tend to carry a palpable aura of energetic command, with a Resonance that often alters their environments in uncanny, elemental ways.

• Perceive Forces

Unlocking basic perceptions of the elements, a Forces-savvy mage can sense the flow of forces in her environment. She can boost her perceptions into the infrared or ultraviolet spectrums, notice electrons, see in the dark, view X-rays, discern the flow of sound or radio waves, spot kinetic energies, and hear frequencies beyond the normal human range.

•• Manipulate Forces/ Elemental Touch

Although she cannot *conjure* energies just yet, the mage may now alter the flow of existing forces. Sound can be muted or amplified; shadows can be gathered, shaped, or dispelled. The mage can warp light to make things invisible, change their colors by altering the spectrum of localized light, or render them silent by bending sound waves in their vicinity. With a wave of her hand, she can disrupt electrical currents; flare flames; or direct the course of winds, momentum, or gravity.

Combining this Rank with other Spheres, that mage could also make an object (Matter) or organism (Life) attract or repel forces. Thus, she could weave minor protection spells or force-fields... or, conversely, turn that target into a magnet (perhaps literally) for the forces in question.

Despite its powers, this Rank is limited in scale. Assume that the mage can command energies around a single human-sized character or within a small area (20' or less). To affect a larger area, you need a higher Rank in Forces.

••• Transmute Minor Forces/ Telekinetics/ The Dragon's Touch

Now the mage can alter and invoke the energies she could only touch before. By adding Prime 2, she may conjure winds, fire, electricity, gravitational wells, and so forth. Combining this Rank with Life or Matter, she can transform people into electricity (Life 5/ Forces 3); change water into air (Forces 3/ Matter 3), or attach elemental force to material forms – making them fly, pinning them to the ground, and having other, similar effects (generally with Life or Matter 3). And by adding an ephemeral Sphere to this Rank, she might erode or enhance energies (Entropy 3); manifest thoughts into energies (Mind 3); transmute spirit-stuff into physical energies (Spirit 3); or set triggers for energy fluctuations at some later interval (Time 4).

At this Rank, the scale of effect grows larger, now encompassing several dozen yards or a handful of characters.

•••• Control Major Forces/ Gift of Zeus/ Weather-Witching

Larger Effects become possible. Our mage may now use the lower-Rank Effects over larger areas – a mile or more – to change weather patterns; conjure darkness; drop or raise temperatures; protect locations... or destroy them; and otherwise employ the previous levels on a much greater scale. For obvious reasons, such Effects tend to be vulgar and demand many successes to achieve.

••••• Transmute Major Forces/ Conjuring Infernos

With godlike power, a Forces Master works her Will upon vast areas. She can conjure tornados on a clear day, calm tides, and ignite the very air into a firestorm. Such mages earn the title "Nuke," though few of them survive long enough to enjoy it. It's easier to invoke such forces under the right conditions, of course – a cold snap comes more easily in winter than in summer – and such radical alterations have repercussions that often outlast the original Effect. In game terms, massive Forces spells should disrupt the weather and leave massive Resonance echoes behind.

Life

The Living Form

***Specialties*: Transformation, Shapeshifting, Healing, Improvement, Creation, Cloning, Evolution, Injury**

Life grows, transforming over time until some final incident renders it into inert matter. Mages who specialize in Life, therefore, master the complex principles of organic transformation. Beginning with the simplest Patterns, he evolves his understanding toward godlike ends. A true Master, therefore, may end life, but he may also create it from pure energy (that is, from Quintessence) or turn it, literally, to dust.

Whereas other Spheres grapple with abstract theories, Life focuses on literally bone-deep facts. As a Life mage knows, however, those facts remain susceptible to change. In conjunction with other Pattern Spheres (Forces, Matter), life-forms can be changed into elements, turned to stone or metal, or else created from such substances. Even without additional Spheres, however, Life allows a mage to transmute those life-forms in startling, even apparently impossible ways.

As a whole, this Sphere embraces everything that has living cells within itself, even if that object is technically dead. As a general rule, assume that anything that's still alive enough to transplant, preserve, or cultivate is governed by Life Arts. If it's inert enough to be irrevocably dead, then it's governed by Matter. Thus, preserved blood and organs, still-living plants, live-culture cheese, and so forth contain Life, but corpses, cotton fibers, withered organs, or cut wood become Matter.

When used to inflict or repair damage, Life deals out aggravated damage because it works directly upon the Patterns of living things. As a result, an organism that has been radically altered by Life magick (given new limbs or other characteristics that are not part of the creature's original Pattern) suffers *Pattern bleeding*: an inexorable Quintessence leak that inflicts one level of lethal damage per day. Unless the caster uses Prime magick to refill that Pattern with fresh energy, or alters that Pattern permanently, the damage continues until the subject dies.

Given their ability to heal illness, age, and harm, Life-skilled mages enjoy great health and vibrant beauty. Truly accomplished ones understand the mutable potential of organic existence and work to correct – or exploit – its ever-changing states.

• Sense Life

Basic Life knowledge allows a person to read the presence and health of nearby life-forms. With such knowledge, the mage can discern a living being's age, sex, and overall health. By combining those perceptions with other Spheres, he can also sense distant organisms (Correspondence 2), guess their potential for sickness or misfortune (Entropy 1), perceive them through past or future states (Time 2), or read the streams of Quintessence that bind them to the universe (Prime 1).

•• Alter Simple Life-Forms/ Heal Self

Simple organisms – viruses, mollusks, insects, plants, etc. – become clay in the mage's hands. He learns to adjust their Patterns (giving a crab wings, for example), and heal or kill them. Although he can't yet transmute them into other states of being, he can cause flowers to bloom or wither, help trees bear fruit, and so on. Focusing on his own Pattern, he can also heal himself or perform small alterations (hair color, skin tone, height, weight, and so on) to his basic form.

••• Transform Simple Life-Forms/ Alter Self/ Heal Others

Advanced understanding allows the mage to radically alter simple organisms (turning a tree inside-out); transform

one into another (changing fruit into insects); or – with Prime 2 – conjure them from raw energy.

Working with his own Pattern, that mage can work substantial alterations on himself, growing gills, claws, armor and so forth. He remains essentially human, but begins to master the *definition* of "human." Meanwhile, he also gains the ability to heal damage to other complex organisms, put them to sleep, or inflict harm upon their living Pattern forms.

•••• Alter Complex Life-Forms/ Transform Self

At this Rank, the mage may enact radical changes on any complex organism – people, dogs, horses, and so forth. He can uplift other species with new limbs, opposable thumbs, increased brain capacity, etc., so long as he doesn't change their intrinsic nature.

Working with his own Pattern, that mage can transform himself into other life-forms of similar size and mass; he could become a Great Dane, for example, but not a hummingbird. Special abilities of that form (flight, water breathing, and the like) do not carry over, however, unless he builds them into that new form with additional Life Effects, and the new body might require an adjustment period before the mind and reflexes reflect the new form.

••••• Transform & Create Complex Life-Forms/ Perfect Metamorphosis

Now the Master of Life may adopt any form he wishes to achieve and may transform other complex organisms the same way. His expertise allows him to make permanent changes to life-Patterns, create complex life-forms from energy (with Prime 2), give them consciousness (with Mind 5), transmute them into other elements (Forces or Matter 3) or raw energy (Prime 5), radically age or de-age them (Entropy 4 or Time 3), or instill them with spirits (Spirit 3 or 5). Without such measures, however, his creations remain mindless, soulless sacks of life – alive, but nothing more.

Matter

Shaping the Materials

***Specialties*: Transmutation, Shaping, Conjuration, Refinement, Complex Patterns**

To a mystic, nothing is truly inert. Still, the Sphere of Matter deals with substances that possess no active agency of their own – *materials*, not life-forms or energies. The third aspect of the Pattern Trinity, Matter works best when combined with other Spheres. Prime and Matter create solid forms from energy; Correspondence and Matter connect objects across space; Entropy erodes or reinforces Matter; Forces transmutes inert elements into active ones. Life plus Matter bridges the gap between living and dead materials – an essential combination when dealing with vampires – and Spirit plus Matter renders ephemera into matter or matter into ephemera. Time alters the temporal state of Matter, and high-Rank Mind Effects (Rank 5) imbue inanimate materials with consciousness. Although Forces, Prime, and Spirit reflect primal energies and Life addresses organic animation, Matter represents the base of the physical world.

Matter-wise mages tend to share a literally hands-on approach to their Art. Solid workers of their practice, they favor practical results with even the most theoretical applications. Sometimes regarded as dull and simple by more esoteric peers, these artisans merge quality and integrity with surprising levels of ingenuity.

• Matter Perceptions

A Primary understanding of Matter allows the initiate to perceive the intrinsic properties of base materials – their underlying structure, innate properties, and integral stability or lack thereof. With that knowledge, she can view the material composition of an object, note its less-obvious structures, find its hidden layers or – when combining this perception with Entropy – spot its weak points. Combined with Life, this Sphere detects implants, enhancements, and other integrations of living tissue and inert materials.

•• Basic Transmutation

With advanced knowledge, the mage can transmute one substance into another, so long as she doesn't alter its essential shape, temperature, or basic state (gas, liquid, solid). Depending upon that mage's practice, she might reshape lead into gold through alchemy, wood into stone through a hyperpetrification process, or water into wine (and, with Life 3, wine into blood) through a sacred miracle. Rare and/ or complex materials are more difficult to fabricate than simple ones; it's easier to turn stone into iron, for example, than into gold. To reflect that challenge, such refinement requires a greater number of successes than a transmutation into a common material.

(On a related note, the mage cannot yet fabricate radioactive materials. Such elements merge their essence into the Sphere of Forces, and thus demand a greater level of expertise.)

When combined with other Spheres, this basic level of understanding allows a mage to conjure base materials from energy or dissolve them into Quintessence (Prime 2), transmute matter into living tissue (Life 4 or higher), move an object through space (Correspondence 2 or higher) or time (Time 3 or higher), change ephemera into matter and matter into ephemera, or awaken the slumbering spirit within material objects (Spirit 3 or higher). In all cases, Matter 2 allows the mage to work with *simple, homogenous, non-living substances*. Complex mixtures of various elements usually require Rank 3 or higher, although simple combinations (like those found in bread, milk, paper, or gunpowder) are possible if the player rolls plenty of successes.

••• Alter Form

At this Rank, the mage can alter the shape of materials in whatever ways she desires, and she can temporarily transform their essential state into a different one – steel, for example, into fog or water into glass. (Permanent changes require Matter 5.) That crafter may change an item's density, fuse broken pieces together, or rip solid ones apart.

By mixing Matter 3 with other Spheres, the mage can join inert matter with living tissue, disintegrate it into dust, shift objects with the power of thought, or otherwise perform amazing transformations upon apparently solid materials.

•••• Complex Transmutation

Complex and radical transformations now become possible, especially with the addition of other Spheres. Pumpkins can be changed into carriages (Life 2), people into thrones (Life 5), cars into robots (combinations of Forces and Prime), or thin air into banquets, so long as the mage doesn't mind racking up a little (or a lot...) of Paradox. Different principles can be combined in complicated ways, creating cybernetic machines or electrified gold. Complicated devices (guns, cars, computers) may be conjured out of empty space if the mage understands the principles behind such things (in game terms, possesses the proper Abilities). As usual, though, complicated creations demand extended rituals and many successes.

••••• Alter Properties

With Mastery, the crafter can create substances that transcend the limitations of scientific possibility, conjure materials unknown to Earthly reality, or share the deadly legacies of radioactive matter. Such Masters can shape armor out of air (with Prime 2), turn vampires into lawn furniture (Life 5), or melt steel with a thought (Mind 3). Again, such deeds remain incredibly vulgar, but they recall the godlike feats of legendry.

Mind

Art of Consciousness

***Specialties*: Communication, Illusion, Emotion, Social Programming, Self-Empowerment, Astral Travel, Mind-Shielding, Psychodynamics, Psychic Combat**

Human beings perceive reality through complex interplays of consciousness. The Mind-mage, therefore, alters the realities of his fellow beings. Skillfully applied, such Arts can make a sane man mad, soothe demented minds, or even shuck the boundaries of flesh.

Though limited in its physical capacities (Mind Sphere attacks inflict bashing damage unless otherwise noted), Mind is the ultimate coincidental Art. Its Effects remain essentially invisible unless they're combined with other Spheres. And although Mind Adepts can leave their physical bodies behind, such abilities remain unseen by mortal eyes.

In many cases, offensive Mind effects – that is, ones that read or influence another character's mental state – base their difficulties on the target's Willpower Trait rather than against the usual coincidental/ vulgar spectrum. (If the target's Willpower is less than 4, the base difficulty is 4.) Drastic acts of mind control (suicide, for instance) go against the Willpower +3, as do Mind-based attacks against Night-Folk or other mages with the Mind Sphere. An unwilling character can also try to oppose such Effects with a resisted Willpower roll, using her successes like a mental dodge maneuver. And so, though weak-willed people may be influenced easily, determined folks can shrug aside the influence of all but the most dedicated Will-workers. **(For details, see *Resisting Psychic Assaults*, pp. 544-545.)**

For attacks against multiple targets, the difficulty for a Mind-based Effect depends upon the usual *coincidental*, *vulgar*, or *vulgar with witnesses* situations. Such Mind-based Effects are generally coincidental, although especially flamboyant feats might be vulgar instead.

Literally "thought-full," Mind-savvy mages possess mental clarity and unnerving perceptiveness. Some appear to drift in a sea of distractions, but the majority of them view the world with laser-focus intensity that penetrates illusions to reach their deeper truth.

• Sense Thoughts & Emotions/ Mind Shield/ Empower Self

With basic mental magick, the mage learns to sense the emotions and surface impulses of other people. Although he cannot read specific thoughts, he's able to perceive psychic impressions about a person or (with Matter 1) a place or object. Through this perception, he can guess at the nature of weak Resonance signatures and read the stronger ones outright. Even without Resonance, that mage can scan auras, note mood shifts, discern truth from lies, or grasp someone's overall state of mind by way of a successful Arete roll.

Meanwhile, the mage also learns to shield his own mind from the thoughts and emotions of other people, constructing mental barriers around his aura, emotions, and consciousness. Each success on a coincidental Arete roll removes one success from any other character's attempt to read those psychic elements.

On a related note, he also learns how to multitask and absorb data with startling acuity. Each success he rolls allows him to either consider an additional subject or speed the processing time that a normal person might require. For scene or two, he can even raise one of his Mental Traits by one dot per success, thanks to a **Mind Empowerment** Effect that concentrates his mental faculties.

•• Read Surface Thoughts/ Empathic Bond/ Create Impressions/ Mental Impulse

Now the mage begins to skim the contents of unshielded minds, discern emotional states, read memories that have been left behind on objects or places, and project single words or emotional impulses to other people. The simpler the emotional content, the easier it is to send or read; a flash of rage, for instance, is easy to project or receive, but the complex stew of reflective melancholy presents a challenge to inexperienced Mind-mages. (Game-wise, such complex feats demand more successes than a simple feat does.)

••• Mental Link/ Project Illusions/ Dreamwalk/ Psychic Blast

With increasing skill, the mage learns to link minds, forge telepathic communications, read or influence another

person's thoughts, craft mental illusions, enter someone's dreams and explore dream Realms, and blast psychic assaults into an unwilling rival's consciousness. At this stage, Mind attacks can inflict painful – though rarely fatal – damage. Combined with Correspondence, Forces, Matter, or Life, he is able to employ telekinesis, pyrokinetics, and psychophysical assault, influencing objects, elements, or people with the power of his mind. Unlike most other Effects, this sort of thing is *not* coincidental, although such talents *do* have a place within popular culture.

•••• Control Conscious Mind/ Alter Consciousness/ Astral Projection

The fearsome power of Black Suits and psychic assailants allows the mage to command another person's actions as well as her thoughts, alter her perceptions or mental state, and project his own mind from his physical form. At this Rank, a mage can change someone's memories, drive her crazy (or sane), overlay her aura with a desired impression, and set up posthypnotic suggestions and commands. (See ***Social Conditioning and Reprogramming*, pp. 605-607.)** And by using internal rather than external powers, he can also project his astral form, as detailed in **Chapter Nine**, pp. 476-478.

••••• Control Subconscious/ Forge Psyche/ Untether Consciousness

A true Mind Master commands not only his own conscious but other minds as well. He may alter someone's mind forever, raising (or lowering) her Traits, rewriting her personality, changing her Nature Trait, or (with Life 4) switching her mind into another body. He can do the same things to his *own* mind as well, and he can untether that mind to explore the deeper reaches of astral space for hours or even days at a time. His greatest power, though, is the ability to fabricate entire consciousnesses, creating minds where no mind had been before.

Prime

Essence of all Things

***Specialties*: Resonance, Artifice, Perceptions, Channeling, Creation, Destruction**

By studying the raw energy of Creation, a student of the Prime Sphere learns to understand, manipulate, and absorb the Fifth Essence within all things. Also known as *Odyllic Force*, *Primal Energy*, and *Quintessence*, this baseline energy fuels the Patterns of other forms – Forces, Life, Matter – and flows through the sublime essence of Spirit. A Prime-skilled mage, therefore, can create and destroy things at their essential level, power items of enchanted or Enlightened creation, and sustain her own life essence through her understanding of Primal Force.

Ripe with such energies, a Prime Sphere specialist pulsates with Primal Force. Unless she's working to suppress it (or has wiped her aura clean with high-Rank magicks), her Resonance bears strong signatures from her deeds. (See ***Resonance and Synergy*, (pp. 560-561)**. For better and worse, such a person embodies the primal Otherness that most mages possess – the sense of being something *more* than most people ever dream of being.

For an optional Technocratic approach to Prime, see ***Primal Utility*, (pp. 526-527)**.

• Etheric Senses/ Consecration/ Infuse Personal Quintessence

A beginning study of Prime allows the mage to perceive and channel Quintessence from Nodes, Tass, Wonders, and magickal Effects. She may spot energetic ebbs and flows, can sense and at least *try* to read Resonance and Synergy signatures, and could also absorb Quintessence into her personal Pattern. Mages without at least one dot in Prime *cannot* absorb Quintessence beyond their Avatar Background rating. A Prime-skilled mage, however, may do so.

When infusing her Quintessence into an object, that mage may also *consecrate* the object with her personal energy. When she shapeshifts, steps sideways, or otherwise alters her Pattern's metaphysical nature, that consecrated object will then change with her. In the process, it also picks up her personal Resonance... which, because it both identifies her and becomes essentially connected to her, is not always a good thing.

•• Fuel Pattern/ Construct Patterns/ Enchant Patterns/ Body of Light

Attaining a degree of control over Prime energies, the mage may divert Quintessence into new or existing forms. Combined with other Spheres, this allows that mage to create new Forces, Life, or Matter Patterns (conjuring them from thin air), and to infuse existing items with Primal Force to strengthen them or enhance their protective or destructive power.

Weapons or attacks infused with Quintessence through Prime 2 Effects may hurt spirits or inflict aggravated damage, and substances infused the same way may protect against such harm. (See **Chapter Nine**'s ***Combat*** section for details.) On a related note, she may also – with Life 2 for simple organisms, or Life 3 for complex ones – consecrate a living thing at this Rank, as if that life-form were an object described above.

Through similar applications of energy, the mage can also conjure a simple **Body of Light**: an idealized self projected from ephemeral energy. Although this Body of Light has no substance or special properties **(unlike the astral form described in Chapter Nine, p. 477)**, it presents a glowing holograph of the mage herself.

••• Channel Quintessence/ Enchant Life/ Energy Weapon/ Craft Periapts & Temporary Wonders

By tapping into the flow of Quintessence around her, the Prime-skilled mage can draw both free and raw Quintessence from Nodes, *Junctures* (special times), and *Tass* (solidified Quintessence)... and she may also channel that energy into new and existing Patterns as well. With such powers, she could (with Life 3) enchant a living thing so that it could inflict or endure aggravated damage; inflict aggravated damage by shaking up

that organism's life force; pull small amounts of life force from a living sacrifice or (with Matter 2) from inert objects; instill Quintessence into a vessel called a *Periapt*; or – with other Spheres – craft *temporary* Talismans or Devices by infusing them with Primal Force. **(Permanent enchantments require Prime 4 – see *Crafting Wonders* on p. 508, and *Quintessence Amounts* on p. 507.)**

In desperate circumstances, a Prime-schooled mage can also create temporary weapons out of pure concentrated energy – blasts of Quintessence or swords of light. Such weapons inflict aggravated damage (as per the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***) and cost one point of Quintessence per use... or, for weapons that last for a length of time, one point per turn. When the mage runs of out Quintessence, the weapon disappears. Unless channeled through energy-guns or conjured as miracles among the faithful, such attacks are inevitably vulgar.

•••• Expel or Infuse Energy/ Tap Wellspring/ Craft Tass & Permanent Wonders

The terrible power of draining Quintessence from objects or forces (though not yet from living things) can disintegrate those targets, consume them in Primal flames, or decay them almost instantly. Reversing that flow, the mage can craft objects that cannot be broken, or bond organic and inorganic materials together to create cybernetic implants, nanotech, and other Wonders. At this stage, she is able to enchant items permanently and draw Quintessence from the energetic *Wellsprings* of exciting events. By infusing her personal Quintessence into a Periapt, the mage might use Matter 4 to craft a *Soulgem*: a portable vessel that's filled with her own Resonance and energy.

••••• Infuse or Withdraw Life Force/ Create Node & Soulflower/ Nullify Paradox

A Prime Master can draw Quintessence from anywhere, at any time, and channel it into other vessels as well. A dark, vulgar aspect of that power allows her to obliterate a living being by consuming all of his life force, whereas the reverse of that power infuses him with life force so strong that he's essentially blessed. Combining that ability with Life 5, she may turn complex organisms into *Soulflowers*: living Periapts who become walking batteries of boosted Quintessence. Such Mastery also allows the mage to create Nodes in significant places, and to nullify Paradox as described under ***Nullifying Paradox***, p. 549.

Spirit

Art of the Otherworlds

***Specialties*: Umbral Travel, Spirit Dealings, Gauntlet Manipulation, Primal Spirits, Tech Spirits, Celestials, Infernals, Possession**

Reaching into the essence beyond Earthly life and matter, the Spirit mage explores the Otherworlds and deals with creatures beyond mortal understanding. One of the most primal forms of the mystic Arts, Spirit Sphere magick traffics in the hidden side of the natural realm. As a result, its Effects typically use the ***Gauntlet Ratings chart*** to determine the difficulty of their associated rolls.

Often affiliated with the shaman, Spirit magick is more eclectic than it often appears. A mage who specializes in this Sphere could be a primal devotee, a sophisticated theologian, a medicine-worker deeply versed in cultural traditions, an eclectic metaphysician, a modern Pagan, or anyone else who comprehends the rich world beyond material physics. Almost inevitably, he'll look deeper than most modern people do, grasping for the spiritual forces behind apparently mundane events.

For an optional Technocratic approach to Spirit, see ***Dimensional Science***, pp. 525-526.

• Spirit Sight/ Spirit Sense

To most of humanity, the spirit world remains invisible. Not to a mage who knows the Spirit Sphere. Although he'll be most attuned to spirits with Resonance similar to his own, that mage can read the local Gauntlet's thickness, discern auras, sense spirits of all types, peek into the Penumbra through the *Vidare* (see **Chapters Three** and **Four**), and determine whether or not a material object has a spiritual component (as mystic Fetishes do).

Combined with other Spheres, that mage can spot forces, places, or items with unusual ties to the spirit world, such as Awakened objects, elemental spirits, possessed organisms, Shallowings, Nodes, and so forth.

•• Touch Spirit/ Manipulate Gauntlet

Perception moves to contact. The Spirit-savvy mage can now reach through the Gauntlet for a turn or two; call across the Gauntlet; speak to spirit entities, or touch them for a brief moment; and thin or thicken the local Gauntlet. In the latter case, each success lowers or raises the Gauntlet rating by +1 for each success rolled. (Four successes would raise or lower it by four levels, for example.) That said, a human mage cannot lower the Gauntlet to less than 4 within the mortal world.

By adding other Spheres, that mage could project thoughts across the barrier (Mind 4 or 5); stir up elemental disturbances within the Otherworlds (Forces 2 or higher); imbue material objects with ephemeral power (Matter 2); drain Essence from a spirit (Prime 3); or help other living creatures sense or contact the spirit realms (Life 2).

••• Pierce Gauntlet/ Step Sideways/ Rouse & Lull Spirit

Now the mage can cross over, transmuting his living tissue to ephemera. He may carry a few material possessions, although transmuting them as well raises both the difficulty of the roll and the number of successes required for the trip. (Normal clothing and items raise both factors by +1; bulky clothing and items raise them by +2.) That traveler must step sideways on his own; bringing large items or other people across demands a higher Spirit Rank. Meanwhile, a combined

Spirit 3/ Mind 2 Effect allows the mage to read Resonance, Synergy, and other spiritual energies (Essence, a spirit's place within a hierarchy, etc.).

At this Rank, a mortal mage can also harm an Umbral entity as if he was using Life 3 against that entity. While Spirit 2 allows the mage to *touch* that entity, Spirit 3 lets him actually damage its ephemeral Pattern's integrity the way that Life 3 damages a physical creature's form.

By combining this Rank with Matter 3 and Prime 2, the mage can also create short-lived objects from ephemera; such creations must be constructed as if they were material things, and they fade away at the end of the Effect's duration.

Finally, this Rank helps the mage rouse the slumbering spirits within objects or places, or else put active spirits to sleep. (See Awakening Substances in Chapter Nine, p. 443).

•••• Rend Gauntlet/ Seal Breach/ Bind Spirit

As the mage approaches Mastery, he can tear Gateways in the Gauntlet, allowing groups or large objects to pass through... or close such breaches, too. Both applications, of course, are deeply vulgar.

At this Rank, the mage may also compel spirits to appear, bind them into Fetish objects, or tie them to certain spots or prisons. For obvious reasons, such bondage is risky, especially if the spirit is powerful. A brave or foolish Spirit mage can even turn *himself* into a temporary Fetish, channeling a spirit entity into his mortal body; in such cases, he loses his ability to use true magick, but he may employ the capabilities of the spirit inside him. On the flipside, he can also exorcise a spirit that has possessed a mortal host. In all cases, the mage enters a series of resisted rolls against the spirit, pitting his Willpower against that spirit's own.

••••• Forge Ephemera/ Gilgul/ Break the Dreamshell

The Spirit Master is now able to command ephemera itself, creating, challenging, and destroying spirit matter as he Wills. With such power, he may craft Realms, imbue or drain a spirit of Essence, instill a soul within an empty shell of Life or Matter, and bestow the awful sentence of *Gilgul* – the destruction of a mage's Avatar. Such powers are always vulgar and feature devastating consequences even when the mage succeeds.

This power also allows the mage to break the Dreamshell and venture beyond the Horizons, wandering into the Deepest of Umbrae. Such tasks demand at least 10 successes, but a courageous Master can travel as far as his soul wants to go.

Time

Tricking the Flow

Specialties: **Perceptions, Prophecy, Triggers, Time Travel, Temporal Control**

The esoteric Arts of Time demand a flexible mindset. Possibly the most confounding Sphere, Time involves dizzying temporal metaphysics that defy the most apparently determined aspect of reality: time itself. And yet, initiates of this Sphere understand that time *is* fluid... difficult to manipulate, but not as rigid as it might appear.

In conjunction with other Spheres, Time allows a mage to set triggers on other Effects, stretch out their duration, see into other times and places, or otherwise warp the threads of time. When employing the Time Sphere to look or reach through time, a player checks the ***Time Sphere Timelines chart***; when prolonging an Effect, she could either spend successes on increased Duration (see the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule chart***), or else add Entropy 3 in order to hold the Effect until a certain circumstance occurs.

It's been said that time travel is impossible; however, that's not entirely true... it's just extremely difficult. Effects that involve going backwards in time add +3 to their difficulty, are *always* vulgar, and stack the effects of Paradox. A character who rewinds time by turns adds one layer of Paradox per turn; going back three turns, for instance, incurs three times the usual Paradox – three points for each point that might otherwise be earned by an Effect at that Rank. And a mage who travels backward according to the ***Time Sphere Timelines chart*** gets two layers of Paradox for each interval on that chart; going back 50 years (or four intervals), for example, nets *eight times* the usual amount of Paradox – eight points for each point normally earned. No wonder people who go back in time rarely return to speak of it!

As one might expect, a mage who manipulates the Time Sphere tends to appear distant from the moment at hand. Although she might have excellent timing, her sense of the *importance* of past/ present/ future events seems to be a bit more... *fluid* than usual for a person living by the clock in today's world.

• Time Sense

Temporal understanding begins with the mage's own perceptions of time. At this stage, she develops a precise internal clock and can spot the temporal ripples left behind by (or, in many cases, developing *ahead of*) Time Effects. Other phenomena, too, leave disturbances in the time-stream, and the mage can notice them as well. Combined with additional Spheres, this Rank allows the mage to detect the influence of the Time Sphere on other spells or Patterns too.

•• Past & Future Sight Thicken the Walls of Time

Now the mage can look forward or backward through time. Although those impressions are fleeting, hazy, not entirely accurate, and bound by the limitations of that time and place (that is, what a bystander in that specific time and location could sense under the circumstances), they allow the Time-seer to catch glimpses of the past or future.

By itself, this Effect allows the mage to see in her present location only. By combining **Past/ Future Sight** with other Spheres, however, she could read the probable past or future impressions of objects or places (Matter), living things (Life), and alternate locations (Correspondence). Entropy 2 even

allows her to glimpse multiple futures and pick out the one most likely to occur.

Reversing her powers of perception, that same mage can thicken the walls of time, which makes other Time Effects more difficult. Each success she rolls deducts one success from the attempts of other Time-savvy characters.

••• Time Contraction or Dilation/ "Bullet Time"/ Rewind Time

Speeding or slowing her relationship with time, the mage can now gain multiple actions, slow other characters or phenomena, or rewind small snatches of time. In game terms, every two successes allow the character to take one additional action *that does not involve casting magick* (only one Arete roll may be made per turn); or else slow another character, object, or even herself down by one increment per success. (Four successes, for example, would slow a person down to a quarter of his normal speed.)

By rewinding time, the mage can also move her immdiate surroundings back one turn for every two successes – an Effect that pulls her out of the normal flow of time and allows her to retcon an action or two. (See above.)

Combining this Rank with other Spheres, the mage can affect other Patterns (Forces, Life, or Matter 2), cast Effects across distance and time (Correspondence 3), move back in time while recalling events from the future she just left (Life 3/ Mind 1), or even invoke multiple probabilities (Entropy 3). Again, such attempts are Paradox magnets with awful long-term consequences.

•••• Time Determinism/ Trigger Effect/ Time Bubble/ Anchor Point

Now the mage learns to withdraw herself from the normal flow of time, hold Effects until they get triggered by events, or – by adding in Correspondence, Forces, Life, Matter, and/ or Spirit – capture other beings or phenomena in bubbles of time. Thus, a mighty (vulgar) Time/ Forces/ Entropy Effect could capture a tornado and shunt it off into no-time space until some trigger sets it free. At this level of expertise, the mage can also set a temporal anchor point for herself for when she dares to travel through time at Rank 5.

••••• Temporal Travel/ Time Immunity

The "Dr. Who Effect" allows the mage to exist outside of time; immunize people, places or things from time's passage; or travel forward or backward through time. Such godlike feats... feats that often cause a mage to become forever lost to history... are often best left to the Storyteller's discretion. Even for Masters, Time travel is a mysterious and maddeningly imprecise art. For extensive details about such things, see the sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That?**

Data (Correspondence)

Accessing Reality Metacode

***Specialties*: Co-location, Encryption, Fabrication, Firewalling, Surveillance/ Sousveillance**

Data *is* reality. Anyone who thinks otherwise is fooling themselves. Although this reality extends only about as far as electronic data or media, that reach is damned near worldwide these days. And through that connection, Data Sphere specialists can find, contact, and reach out to anyone on the grid. All it takes is time and a little bit of information, plus the knowledge and the Will to work it properly.

A Technocratic refinement of the Correspondence Sphere, Data remains the province of the Virtual Adepts, the New World Order, and the various allies they choose to share it with. Like all Spheres, its properties are meta-physical, extending beyond the realms of conventional reality. Although the Data specialist is, theoretically, just using the tools at his disposal, the greater reaches of this Sphere extend beyond the bounds of what should be possible, according to the Masses. It's not "magick," of course – stop thinking such unmutual thoughts! It does, however, pull the strands of Information-Age technology in some pretty impressive ways.

In most regards, Data functions like Correspondence with regards to the powers at its disposal. The primary differences come through the elements of connection (see the chart below) and the methods of its employment. To use Data-based Effects, the technomancer must collate data about the person or location he's trying to reach, and then have gear in place that can reach the subject of his attention. The more expertise that specialist brings to bear on the situation (that is, the more dots he has in this Sphere), the easier it is for him to establish a connection with minimal amounts of data.

For this Sphere's associated paradigm, see ***Everything is Data***, (p. 570).

Because Data depends upon technological methods of information and connection, a target who's not on the grid cannot be affected by this Sphere. Given the current (and growing) extent of information technology, however, the Data can reach most people within the industrialized world... especially if they participate in social media, modern banking, or government processes.

A Data specialist knows his way around the technology of our age. Though he might not be the humorless grunt so often associated with number-crunching disciplines, he's certainly got intense focus, an eye for detail, and a ruthless capacity for exploiting the bounds and bindings of information technologies.

• On the Ones and Zeros

Through a haze of code, the Data initiate begins to see the interconnectedness of all things. Bringing that esoteric level of comprehension to the world beyond his keyboard, the specialist can determine the exact distance between points or the connections between visible objects. His understanding allows him to work on base-level projects without instruments, thanks to a growing familiarity with relationship information.

•• The Reach and the View

With a few quick calculations, the specialist can assess theoretical and practical space – assessments that allow him to perceive what's happening elsewhere. Expanding the metaphysical elements of this discipline, this understanding allows the agent to see and touch places in other areas of the world, so long as he has instruments that allow him access to distant locations.

Combining Data with other Spheres, the specialist can extend the practical range of Technocratic Effects. Matter allows him to modify Union tech from a distance; Mind lets him communicate with agents or targets worldwide; Forces lets him attack distant targets; and Entropy allows him to predict and alter probability patterns and spot flaws in objects that he can perceive. As with regular Correspondence, the operator's Data Rank must be equal to, or higher than, the highest Rank in a connected Effect.

••• Quantum Teleportation/ Firewalling/ Surveillance Hub

Advanced Data transfer techniques allow the specialist to more or less sidestep conventional physics of spatial dimensions. In practical terms, this allows him to download himself into quantum teleportation mode; erect firewalls of particle physics that effectively ward objects, places, or people; and divide his perceptions across a multilocational surveillance hub. Combined with other Spheres, this expertise helps the agent move things, forces, and living beings through intervening space.

Data Connections

Data Mastery	Successes	Time Per Roll	Operator/ Subject Connection
One dot	8	Four hours	Subject's presence or body sample; source code; government ID database information
Two dots	6	Two hours	A treasured possession or intimate companion; sample code; personal email or social media account
Three dots	4	One hour	Casual possession or associate; legacy code; Internet sock puppet; throwaway email or media account
Four dots	3	One minute	Acquaintance of or item from subject; derivative code; IP address
Five dots	2	One minute	Operator briefly touched or met subject; code from same language; rerouted IP string

Again, however, these Procedures demand the appropriate gear on either side of the Effect. Such violations of conventional physics demand the proper technology.

•••• Between Space/ Dimensional Cohabitation/ Multilocation Access

With such technology in place, the expert specialist can open quantum gateways between locations, create pocket dimensions between conventional space-time continuums, and disperse holographic manifestations of himself into several concurrent locations. With the appropriate Life, Mind, and Primal Force Procedures, those manifestations can even become as solid as the agent himself and perform different tasks in the finest Agent Smith tradition.

••••• Redistribute Physical Properties Fold Space/ Hyperdispersed Perceptions

Data Mastery merges conventional physics with sophisticated hypermath. The few specialists at this level can stack physical locations into the same space, alter the spatial dimensions and properties of a target, or disperse their perceptions into so many concurrent locations that a specialist may truthfully be said to have eyes and ears everywhere.

Dimensional Science (Spirit)

Parsing Alternate Reality Spectrums

***Specialties*: Subdimensions, Anthropic Principle Applications, EDE Relations, Mapping, Applied Theory, Dimensional Anomaly**

Based upon the Tychoidian cosmology theories of the Void Engineers (see Chapter Four, pp. 93-94), Dimensional Science posits an *Anthropic Principle Field* in which the conscious human mind exerts a degree of control over its metaphysical reality space. Because of that Principle, lesser subdimensions have collected outside of Earthly space, losers in some contest of metaphysical Darwinism. The entities native to those subdimensions – *extradimensional entities*, or *EDEs* – strive to pass the Earthly barriers and infect the human world. And that's where Dimensional Science comes in, a method of asserting the Enlightened elements of the Anthropic Principle and keeping those EDEs out of human space.

In game terms, Dimensional Science is largely the same as the Spirit Sphere. Like other Technocratic Spheres of Influence, however, its Effects are bound to technological gear and viewed through a lens of science, not mysticism. Although Void Engineers still apply the term *Umbrae* to these subdimensions (considering them mathematical shadows of the human Consensus), the Dimensional Specialist's approach lacks animistic reverence, even though it features scientific awe.

Unlike Data, Dimensional Science remains largely exclusive to a single Convention: the Void Engineers. In many regards, it's a well-kept secret, propagated only through intense training at VE facilities. The Dimensional Specialist, then, is a man or woman of intense focus within a multilevel framework of thinking and perception. By outside standards, she appears paranoid... but of course, if *you* knew the things she knows about the pervasive nature of subdimensions and EDEs, you'd be paranoid too...

• EDE Scan/ Evaluate Gauntlet/ Map Dimensional Region

Through applied principles and technologies, the specialist learns to perceive EDE presence and potential incursions, evaluate the characteristics of alternate dimensions and thickness of the barrier that keeps them outside the Consensus, and perceive the essential terrain in the pocket dimensions on the other side of that Gauntlet.

•• Dimensional Vibration/ Modify Dimensional Gauntlet/ Transdimensional Field

At this level of expertise, the specialist can use radiation pulses, hypermath, and samples of transdimensional matter to grant access to those alternate dimensions. With the correct instruments, that specialist can send out artificial ripples into nearby subdimensions in order to attract EDEs and leave signals for other Dimensional Specialists.

Thanks to the hypermathematical models and recordings involved in Dimensional Science, a specialist can also manipulate the Gauntlet, raising or lowering it, even as low as 0 – a feat mystic mages cannot duplicate. The Gauntlet 0 Effect lasts for only one scene, but it counters the punishment of the Dimensional Anomaly (that is, the Avatar Storm) if that phenomenon is still in play. However, the specialist herself still suffers feedback damage as she works the Effect. (In game terms, she takes the usual Avatar Storm damage, though she prevents other characters from taking it during that scene.)

On a related note, the specialist learns to also surround herself (or, with the appropriate Spheres, other people or objects) with a transdimensional field; this, in turn, allows her to interact with subdimensions on a limited level (brief touch) without suffering harm from the Dimensional Anomaly.

••• Dimensional Shift/ Manipulate Paraphysical Phenomena/ Phase Disruption Field

Increased understanding allows the specialist to step sideways into alternate dimensions, manipulate the paraphysical matter (that is, ephemera) of those dimensions, and – with the correct weaponry – send out destructive **phase disruption fields** of vibrations that disorient, injure, or disintegrate EDEs. (In short, her attacks can harm spirit entities.) Thanks to the *Stun/ Kill/ Disintegrate* settings on those weapons, she can choose whether to inflict bashing, lethal, or aggravated damage on Umbral targets... and although EDE's experience all forms of damage the same way, dimension-hopping humans and Deviant werebeasts do not.

•••• Alter Dimensional Topography/ Dimensional Gateway/ Stabilize Dimensional Field

Increased understanding and appropriate technologies help the specialist make lasting changes to alternate dimensions. Reworking the paraphysical constraints of a given space, she may craft pocket domains and dimensional walls in order to block or catch EDEs. A skilled specialist can do this even from the Earthly side of the Gauntlet, thus avoiding the effects of the Dimensional Anomaly. Using similar techniques, the specialist can also carve out rapid-transit paths; in game terms, this Effect cuts down the specialist's travel time within the Otherworlds by (normal travel time divided by successes +1).

The specialist can also open large gateways into the subdimensions, although the people passing through those gates suffer the effects of the Anomaly unless the Gauntlet has already been lowered to 0 by a Dimension Science 2 Procedure.

Channeling Primal Energy (Quintessence) through appropriate technology, the specialist can also strengthen the Enlightened Anthropic Principle enough to prevent *Void Adaptation* (that is, disconnection and disembodiment; see *Disembodiment* in Chapter Four, pp. 88-89; and *Disconnection and Disembodiment* in Chapter Nine, p. 483.) Each point of Quintessence allows one character to resist Void Adaptation for one week.

••••• Anthropic Field/ Breach Spatial Horizon/ Cosmogenesis

Utilizing the ultimate applications of Anthropic Principle Fields, the specialist can generate her own Anthropic Field (with the right instruments, of course) that allows her to venture beyond both Horizons and venture into the Deep Universe. By crafting a reality bubble around herself, that specialist can keep other Earthly beings alive with her as well (two passengers per additional success beyond the second) and can engineer and pilot vehicles for Deep Universe travel. For design and construction systems, see ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology*** in **Chapter Nine**, (pp. 463-464).

Employing the arcane technologies of **Cosmogenesis**, that Master Specialist may also engineer and create Horizon Constructs and custom-designed and constructed EDE organisms. She must employ Primal Utility energies as well (often including Life and Matter if the EDE construct is to survive outside the subdimensions... that is, if it's going to be more than simple ephemera), but these cosmic computations allow Void Engineers to harness powers not unlike those of legendary gods.

Primal Utility (Prime)

Investing Essential Energies

Specialties: Assessment, Investment, Wellsprings, Personal Value, Primal Ventures, Generating Energetic Capital

To the Enlightened Hypereconomist, Prime is not some ephemeral energy bubbling up from the cracks of the world. Instead, it's an energy field generated by *Homo economicus*: the ambitiously conscious human being who acts to further his or her self-interest. Related to the VE theory of Enlightened Anthropic Principle Fields (although they don't know it by that name), the Syndicate's hypereconomic theories see Quintessence energy rising from human interest and activity. People literally invest themselves in such ventures, and although they might not *see* the energy they create through such transactions, they can *feel* it... hence the sensations involved in feeling valued or worthless.

Whereas other Technocratic Conventions stick close to the "essential energies" model of Prime, the Syndicate's Primal Utility specialists understand the Sphere differently. In game terms, the applications are more or less the same. For a Syndicate character, however, Prime flows through investing and withdrawing energetic currency through *Ventures* (value-generating Nodes – see the chart below) that manipulate the metaphysical economies of human value. By accessing what they call "creation's credit rating", the hypereconomist controls that currency, investing it where it does the most good... for him.

Perhaps the greatest edge granted to those who understand Primal Utility comes from the aforementioned Ventures. By investing in a Venture, the hypereconomist can draw Primal Energy (Quintessence) from a mundane business. In game terms, that business becomes a Node; if the character has a lasting personal connection with that Venture, then he's got access to that Node as well. Only a character with at least one dot in Primal Utility can access the Quintessence from that Venture; another mage might sense the energies but remain unable to access their power.

Prime-savvy hypereconomists always watch for invisible bottom lines. Attuned to the effects of Market Correction (Paradox) and the perpetual exchange of energies conducted through human intercourse (sexual and otherwise), he can spot value – or the lack of it – in the least obvious situations, and he knows how to get the most for his investments in whatever form they might manifest.

• Assess Primal Utility/ Deposit Primal Utility/ Exploit Primal Venture

Assessment analysis gives the hypereconomist a view of Prime flows, Resonance signatures, and applied metaphysical processes (that is, magick) in his vicinity. As with all other Technocratic Sphere Effects, this demands the correct instruments and training, although certain practices and instruments (especially dominion and hypereconomics) simply give the specialist a hunch about the energies in play. Some specialists see colorful flows of energy but dismiss such visions as simply mental constructs for an otherwise invisible process.

As with Prime 1, the hypereconomist can also invest such energies and can utilize the Prime Force generated by Ventures as well as other, more mystical sources of Quintessence.

Primal Ventures

Venture Scale	Equivalent Node Rating	Required Connection*
Successful local business/ small factory/ large farm/ street gang	•	Visit facilities, befriend gang, make purchase, or invest • Resources
City-wide marketplace/ city mob/ medium-sized factory/ agribusiness facility/ common resource-extraction company (coal, iron, oil, etc.)	••	Entry-level position, gang affiliation, establish contract, become stockholder, or invest •• Resources
Regional market leader/ organized crime council/ rare resource extraction (gold, silver, diamonds, etc.)	•••	Lower management, made man, consultant, invest ••• Resources
National market leader/ major crime syndicate/ ultra-rare resources extraction (iridium, tanzanite, etc.)	••••	Middle management, senior consultant, mob enforcer or senior brother, invest •••• Resources
International leader or crime cartel	•••••	Executive, board member, or mob kingpin, invest ••••• Resources

** Each dot in Primal Utility reduces the specialist's required connection by one step for each dot over the first. A specialist with three dots, for instance, could simply visit (one dot's worth of connection) a large factory (a three-dot Venture) in order to draw upon its energy.*

•• Create Gadgets/ Perfect Material Exploitation/ Primal Innovation

Through sophisticated uses of instruments and principles, the hypereconomist can modify existing materials with an energized-value buzz; he can even create something from nothing, thanks to the principle of increased worth. In game terms, this allows him to use the normal Prime 2 Effects, although the character still needs to have some technological source to facilitate his conjurations.

••• Create Stable Extraordinary Devices/ Living-Asset Exploitation/ Use Currency & Primal Storage

Utilizing energetic manifestations called *Currency* (in mystic terms, Tass), plus efficient managerial skills (see the *Management and Human Resources* sidebar, p. 595), the specialist can employ a team to create permanent Devices with his Currency, restore his personal stock (Pattern) with Currency, and drain or refill Devices and storage batteries called *Matrices* (that is, Periapts) with his available Currency.

•••• Create Tass/ Exploit Opportunity/ Liquidate Assets

Skillful use of hypereconomics now allows the specialist to create Currency from free-flowing energy. Typically, this Tass involves precious materials, paper money, credit cards, or other items of value (paintings, stock certificates, bearer bonds, drugs, etc.). Unlike mystic mages (or other Technocrats), however, he can use only the energy generated by Primal Utility activities... and not, for example, charge up his Platinum card at the nearest Node.

By exploiting the Primal Opportunities called "wellsprings" in superstitionist jargon, that hypereconomist can also draw energy out of an exciting event rather than a consistent source. On the flipside, he can also destroy material objects while divesting them of their value (Quintessence). Although the specialist cannot access this energy, he can keep other people from utilizing those resources. ("*I'd sooner burn this warehouse down than let you have it...*")

••••• Create Living Assets/ Generate Primal Conflux & Ventures/ Liquidate Living Assets/ Market Compensation

Like Mastery of the mystic Prime, Mastery of this Rank allows the specialist to create permanent Devices, open new Confluxes (Nodes) and Ventures, liquidate living things (typically through vulgar applications of disintegration technology – although he could simply shoot someone and then burn the body), and negate the effects of Market Correction (Paradox) as if he were a Master of Prime Arts... though, of course, he has more technological finesse.

Optional Rule: Wild Talent

Uncontrolled Paranormal Power

A sudden burst of uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) magick, the wild talent phenomenon manifests through intense stress, pain, trauma, or brand-new Enlightenment. Essentially, the Avatar screams out an incredible blast of power – one far beyond the reach of the average mage. The person at the center of that power has no real control over what happens or how it occurs; the talent simply appears, changes that person's world, and then fades.

Unlike the previous entries, wild talent is not a Sphere. Rather, it's a plot device that represents uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) currents of Awakened energy. The mage in question has awareness without understanding, and the results can be as devastating as they are spectacular.

Rules-wise, wild talent allows a character to use powers far beyond her usual ability. For a scene or two, she commands an Arete dice pool that's one, two, or perhaps three dice higher than usual; employs Spheres she might not understand; and may access Sphere Ranks 3, 4, or even 5 if the Storyteller so desires. That's the catch: the *Storyteller*, not the *player*, decides what happens, how it happens, and how long it happens for. The player can state what she'd *like* to have happen, but the final decisions come from the Storyteller.

Marauder Wild Talent

For the most part, wild talent occurs once or twice in a mage's life – often at the moment of Awakening, sometimes at the point of death. It's *always* a dramatic event, linked to some great moment of crisis. Certain Marauders, however, manifest their magicks through a constant state of wild talent, unleashing powerful spells whose results they cannot control.

Such characters rarely have more than a point or two of Arete (they *are* Awakened, after all) but possess Avatars of 4 or 5. Essentially, the Avatar Background functions as their wild talent Arete, adding the Avatar rating to the character's normal Arete. This way, the Marauder has access to incredible powers, controlled and managed by the Avatar. Given the capricious nature of Avatars, however, those powers cannot be counted upon; the wild talent Arete comes and goes, according to the Storyteller's whims and the dictates of the chronicle.

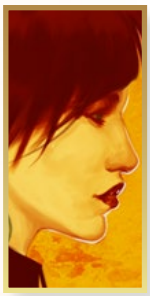
Again, such powers remain extremely unpredictable. Given the potential for abuse, however, we *strongly* suggest limiting this option to non-player Marauders – mysterious characters, run by the Storyteller, who show up, do something impressive, and then disappear.

The Death-Strike

As an additional option, a dying mage *MIGHT* be allowed a *death-strike*: a final act of magick that channels his remaining life force into an attack or defense more powerful than anything he could normally attempt. For this final strike, the player could get one or two additional dice for his Arete roll and employ an Effect that's one or two Ranks higher than his usual rating in the Spheres. After that point, however, he dies.

Despite its name, a death-strike doesn't have to be an attack – it could be an act of self-sacrifice to defend another party, open a gate, summon a powerful entity, or perform some other heroic feat. The death of Porthos Fitz-Empress, who contained the implosion of Doissetep, provides a legendary example of the death-strike in action. It's also worth noting that the bad guys can do such things too... which is something to consider if the heroes fight an enemy to the point of his demise.

Part III: Casting Magick, Step By Step



Okay, so what do all those charts *mean?* Here, step by step, are the elements of spellcasting and the details about what's involved in each element.

Step One: Effect

Before you check Traits and roll dice, ask yourself: *What do I want to do, and how do I plan to accomplish it?* The answers for those questions come into play during **Step One**.

The Effect of What You're Doing

As mentioned earlier, every magickal act is referred to, in game terms, as an *Effect*. Generally, Effects get described in terms of the Spheres you use to perform that Effect. Looking for flaws with Entropy? That's an Entropy 1 Effect. Changing your hair from brown to blue? That's a Life 2 Effect if you're using Spheres instead of hair dye. Firing a hypertech pulse-cannon? That's an Effect using Forces 3 (to create the destructive element) + Prime 2 (to provide the energy that creates that element). Whatever a mage does with Arete and the Spheres has an effect upon the local reality. And so, when you're figuring out what you want to do, you're deciding upon the Effect you wish to create.

For easy reference, see the collection of ***Common Magickal Effects*** presented on (pp. 508-510). These aren't necessarily the *only* ways of performing a given feat (although many of them *are*), but they show you how to get a lot of things done.

Game Terms vs. Character Terms

As a roleplaying note, please remember that characters *NEVER* call what they're doing "Effects." A witch will cast a spell, a Black Suit will activate a Procedure, a scientist will pull a lever or punch a command into her keyboard, but you won't hear any of them proclaiming "*LO, I EMPLOY MY ARETE TO CAST A FORCES 3 EFFECT ON YOU!*" That's game talk, not character talk.

Spheres: The Foundation of Each Effect

Practically speaking, a Sphere determines what your character can do. In a broader sense, the Spheres reflect your character's knowledge about the metaphysical forces he employs. When you're determining what you can do and how you can do it, the Spheres provide the foundation of your abilities. To command fire, for example, you need to have the Forces Sphere.

The various Spheres and their capabilities can be found in the previous section.

How Many Effects Can I Use at Once?

A mage can cast only one Effect per turn, even if she's using Time 3 magick to speed up her activities. She may, however, keep any number of Effects running at a time, although it becomes more and more difficult for her to do so.

Game-wise, you add +1 to your difficulty for every two Effects you have running at one time – that is, +1 difficulty for

two Effects, +2 for four Effects, +3 for six Effects, and so on. In this case, the difficulty can go higher than the usual limit of +3... which makes it damn near impossible to juggle a large number of simultaneous Effects.

As an overall note, an Effect that has a Time-based trigger, one which has been locked into another Pattern, or one that has been cast but whose duration has not yet expired, does not count toward that total. If Lee Ann enchants a guy, and if – thanks to the number of successes rolled – that enchantment lasts for a week after they part company, then Lee Ann does not have to concentrate on the Effect in order to keep it going. If she wishes to *keep* the Effect in motion, however, then it counts against the number of Effects that character can employ at the same time.

Instant Effects and Rituals

Many Effects take place instantly; if you throw a lightning bolt, for example, that Effect is over once the bolt hits its target. Rituals, on the other hand, demand intense concentration. No more than two Effects can be used at once during the casting of a ritual – see the ***Rituals*** entry under **Step Three**, (pp. 538-542).

Rotes, Procedures, and Other Prepared Effects

Mages like to be prepared. Thus, although freeform reality-crafting is any mage's prerogative, many characters employ previously prepared Effects – *rotes*, *spells*, *Procedures*, *Adjustments*, and so forth – as part of their mystic or technological bag of tricks. For simplicity's sake, we'll just call such Effects "rotes" for now. Certainly, no good Technocrat would be Deviant enough to use words like "spell" or "magick" to refer to what he does, but the various terms all mean the same thing as far as game systems are concerned.

Knowing and Learning Rotes

Rules-wise, a rote is simply an Effect that your character has used before or learned from someone else. Some groups teach rotes as part of basic training, whereas others pass them along to their close friends, apprentices, and so on.

Beyond the story-based opportunities to learn such tricks, there's nothing special about a rote. You *do not* need to spend points to learn one, nor are you limited to a certain number of rotes. If your group wants to reflect the process of learning rotes from some other character or source, simply roll your character's Intelligence + either Esoterica (for mystic techniques) or Science (for technomagickal rotes), with a difficulty based upon the highest Sphere in that rote + 5. Learning a Rank 1 rote would be difficulty 6, and a Rank 5 rote would be difficulty 10.

If you want to have characters discover rotes through research or mystic/ technological tomes, use a Perception + Research roll with the same difficulties given above. This way, a hidden library or forbidden codex can present new and interesting opportunities for a sharp-witted character.

Naturally, *the mage must share a focus with the rote in question* before he can use it to his benefit. A Man in Black isn't going to get far with a voodoo curse unless he adjusts his thinking to accommodate such Deviant ideas! A character who wants to adopt a rote from a different practice or paradigm would be casting that Effect at +2 difficulty, as if he were working with unfamiliar tools... which is, of course, exactly what he's doing.

For a small assortment of rotes, see ***Part VIII: Adjustments, Procedures, and Rotes***, near the end of this chapter.

Step Two: Ability

Once you've gone through **Step One**, you know what your mage is planning to do and what he'll use in order to get the job done. The first question in **Step Two** is simple: *Can he do it, given the things he knows and the things he employs?*

To get your answer, check your character's focus and its associated Traits to see whether or not he has what it takes to accomplish what you've set out to do. The question of Spheres is easy enough; if you've got the appropriate Rank in the appropriate Spheres, then in game terms, yes – your character can do it.

Focus: How Your Character Does It

The second part is a bit trickier: Does your mage *BELIEVE* that he can do such things? Sure, maybe you've got Forces 3 and Prime 2 on your character sheet. A Black Suit can't just snap her fingers and make fireballs appear, however. Such feats don't fit her focus – they violate her beliefs. She can't conjure fire using someone else's focus, either; if you gave her a rune-carved staff, she'd try to hit someone with it, not summon a firestorm. That sort of nonsense is Reality Deviance, and so – Spheres be damned – the Black Suit could no more conjure fire with a staff than she could fart unicorns and shoot them into space.

So that's where roleplaying comes in.

Belief, Practice, and Tools

In **Mage**'s previous iterations, "focus" referred to the tools that a mage used to cast her Effects. Now, however, we've expanded that term to encompass the beliefs (or *paradigm*) that a mage accepts as the source of her power; the practice she uses in order to direct her beliefs toward intentions; and the tools that she uses in the course of that practice. Previous chapters have shown how those three factors depend upon the background of each individual mage. The ***Focus and the Arts*** section later in this chapter explores the many different options your character could use. For right now, simply remember this: *when you cast an Effect, your character's FOCUS determines what she does*. And that focus depends upon the character herself.

As detailed in **Chapters One**, **Two**, and **Six**, mages *focus* their Effects through a combination of paradigm, practice, and tools. Step Two involves thinking from your mage's perspective – ignoring the dots on your character sheet in favor of whether or not your character would *believe* in what you have in mind. If the answer is *No*, as with the Black Suit mentioned above, then think of another way to make things happen. Okay, the rune-carved staff won't work... but a lighter and some hairspray would! In the story, the agent rushes to the bathroom cabinet, grabs the Aqua Net, pulls a lighter out of her pocket, and there you go. Now your Black Suit can conjure a fireball with

Pulling on Mythic Threads

Strands of legendry and lore, the ***Mythic Threads*** **(see Chapter Two, p. 61)** tie into the Collective Unconscious and reinforce the iconic power of certain mystic and technological symbols. Especially in the current era, symbolic figures like witches, wizards, cops, and superheroes exert a literally fantastic pull on the Consensus. Although folks like to claim that "magic is dead," the Masses have not yet received that particular memo.

In game terms, a mage of any faction can ***manipulate Mythic Threads*** in order to reduce the difficulty of an Effect by -1. Essentially, he employs potent symbology as part of his focus, drawing on the power of iconic figures and ideas. Black robes or leather, religious symbols, arcane glyphs and designs, elemental phenomena (fire, thunder, fog, etc.) – used cleverly, such trappings invoke the suspension of disbelief and prime the Masses to accept things that, under other circumstances, they might consider irrational. Ideally, such tactics could even make certain Effects coincidental that would be considered vulgar otherwise.

For more details about using Mythic Threads, see the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart*** and the sidebar ***Optional Rule: Significant Instruments***, **(p. 588)**.

a Forces 3/ Prime 2 Effect, using the lighter and the spray can as a focus instrument.

Using Tools If You Don't Need Them

Even if they've realized that they don't *need* rituals and tools, many mages prefer to use them anyway. As far as the character's concerned, he's simply using a familiar method in order to direct his intentions – it's a comfortable habit, but not a requirement.

In game terms, the character may have transcended the need for a given instrument, but he still uses it anyway to get a slight edge. That edge comes through as a -1 reduction on the Arete roll difficulty, which for easy reference can be found on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart***.

For more details about focus, practices, and tools, see ***Part VII: Focus and the Arts***.

Rituals as a Focus

Fairly often, a mage's focus demands a ritual before the intentions become an Effect. In story terms, that character programs the virus, tosses the bones, performs the dance, endures the ordeal, or does whatever else his beliefs and practice say he has to do in order to cast his magick.

Game-wise, a ritual is simply the use of a focus as part of an extended action that gathers a necessary number of successes. For details, see the section about ***Rituals, Rolls, and Extended Successes***, under **Step Three**.

Roleplaying the magick puts some limitations on your character's capabilities, requires you to think about your mage's beliefs, and demands some imagination on your part. Really, though, isn't imagination what Storytelling games are all about? By thinking through your mage's perspective, you add a bit of real-life magic to the fictional magick within the game.

Coincidental Magick vs. Vulgar Magick

Speaking of imagination and magick...

As **Chapter Two** points out, the easiest way to perform magick is to make it seem like part of the natural landscape. In the old days, this meant fitting your spells and practices into the local belief system. These days, that's still true... but technology, not magic, is the lay of that land. And so, mages (and **Mage** players) favor coincidental magick over more obvious, vulgar applications of the Arts.

An important element of **Steps Two and Three** involves the question *Is what you're doing coincidental or vulgar?* In **Step Two**, the question helps you decide what to do; in **Step Three**, the answer determines the difficulty of your casting roll and the results of that roll in the rest of the story.

Story-wise, the coincidental spell or ritual fits into the spectrum of what people believe is possible, whereas the vulgar spell or ritual shoves apparently impossible things into the faces of Reality and the Masses. The coincidental Effect appears to be something that's more or less ordinary, but the vulgar Effect essentially drops "ordinary" off the nearest building. Calling your mom on a cell phone is coincidental; waving your hands in the air, chanting the names of seven devils, and then having Mom's face appear in the air in front of you so you can talk to her is vulgar.

Game-wise, you've got three compelling reasons to make your Effects coincidental as often as possible:

- First off, it's easier to cast a coincidental Effect than it is to cast a vulgar one – the difficulty is less, and so are the risks. Because the difficulty's lower, you're more likely to succeed... and to score more successes, too.
- Secondly, vulgar magick inflicts Paradox points upon your character even if she succeeds... and heaps even *more* of them upon her if she fails.
- Thirdly, various characters and agencies have a vested interest in stopping people who use vulgar magick; by using it, your mage risks attracting their attention... which, in both game and story terms, is not a healthy thing to do.

And yet, there are times when vulgar magick is the only option. There's no coincidental way to step sideways or download yourself into the Digital Web. A sudden bolt of fire from Heaven might be the one thing standing between a

vampire and a child, so if bringing that fire down violates the laws of reality, then that's what you've gotta do. Mages, by their nature, are people who dare the impossible. And so – in both game and story terms – vulgar magick remains an essential part of every mage's life.

The trick, then, involves fitting your Effects, your focus, and your needs in with the boundaries of coincidence and vulgarity, making judgment calls between what you do, how you do it, and what happens as a result.

And *that* takes imagination, cunning, and nerve.

Witnesses

Because many mystic practices simply can't be passed off as coincidence, a mage has to be clever about what he does, how he does it, and who's watching *when* he does it. Even technomancers must remain careful about that sort of thing – animating dead bodies with a Vita Ray still counts as impossible so far as most people are concerned.

A witness, in game terms, is someone who's physically present when the magick occurs. Cameras, video feeds, YouTube, and so forth *do not count as witnesses,* although a mage still faces certain problems if she winds up getting posted on the Internet performing obvious magick.

Despite common preconceptions, a Sleeper can be rattled by acts of Enlightened Science as well as by magick, especially if that person has accepted the idea that sentient robots and functional jetpacks are beyond the reach of current technology. Technocrats *can* and *do* suffer from the Paradox Effect. Although the Masses certainly seem more willing to accept the possibilities of hypertech, real science is defined not by flash but by limitations.

As a result, a lot of the choices involved in magick depend upon having a clear space to work in – casting Effects in safe space rather than out among the Masses, clearing the area of potential witnesses, working in secrecy whenever possible, that sort of thing. There are practical reasons, after all, for secret laboratories, hidden cottages, forbidden temples, and Black Suits radiating their *Nothing to see here – move along* auras. Such measures give mages room to move, far from the eyes of a Sleeper witness.

The Sleeper Witness, the Consensus, and Paradox

What's a Sleeper witness? As explained below, a Sleeper witness is someone whose beliefs conform to the local ideas about what is and is not possible. Such people are not Awakened in the sense that mages are, and although they might enjoy movies about vampires or books about wizards, such things are not part of their everyday reality. Sure, a person might accept the idea of supernatural forces or paranormal abilities in an abstract sort of way. He might pray to the ghost of a Jewish carpenter who's supposed to descend in glory from the sky and raise the dead for eternal judgment in Heaven or Hell. If, however, that person sees *a real manifestation of ACTUAL magick* – say, his neighbor flying through the air on a broom – then his view of reality is in for a rude kick in the pants. And so, by extension, is the neighbor on her broom.

As previous chapters have explained, "just plain folks" set the momentum of reality as a whole. These people *are* the Consensus. The fact that reality is a lot weirder than they realize is an abstract idea for them... one they don't really want to think about. When a mage forces the Masses to confront that truth, that mage is overriding their Consensus with her own. And that's risky. Practically speaking, such override attempts are more difficult to accomplish than apparent coincidences are, and the price of failure is Paradox.

From both a story and a game perspective, then, you'll probably want your character to avoid Sleeper witnesses as often as possible, surround herself with sympathetic allies, and keep her Arts and workings on the down-low. Ideally, you'll be performing Effects in solitude, Chantries, Sanctums, Nodes, and other relatively safe spaces.

In both life and fiction, of course, safety is an illusion. Desperate circumstances often call for desperate measures, and even the most circumspect mage can find herself reaching for vulgar magick in the middle of a crowd. That's just the way things go down in the World of Darkness. If you avoid doing flashy stuff around witnesses, however, then you'll have more leeway to employ desperate measures and pull out the big guns when you need them.

Drawing the Line

As a general rule, assume the following line between coincidental and vulgar magick:

- If the average person walking down the street could see what your mage is doing and think, "*Oh, yeah – human beings can TOTALLY do that*," then it's a coincidence.

- If the average person walking down the street could see what your mage is doing and think, "*Holy crap – human beings can't do THAT!*" then it's vulgar.

There's plenty of gray area on either side of that line, of course... a lot of which depends upon that whole "average person" thing. But as a quick-n-dirty rule, assume that your mage should be subtle whenever possible, and be ready to take the consequences when she decides not to be.

Do the Night-Folk Count as Witnesses?

To be clear: *a Sleeper witness is someone whose life does not include intimate experience with an active supernatural world.* The Night-Folk and their various allies and enemies – ghouls, kinfolk, kinain, cultists, Infernalists, mummies, hunters, etc. – *DO NOT COUNT as Sleeper witnesses.* Period.

(We emphasize this answer because it's a topic of constant debate.)

Acolytes and extraordinary citizens are slightly more complicated:

- A Technocratic extraordinary citizen does *not* count as a Sleeper witness with regards to technomagickal procedures but *does* count as one with regards to mystic magick. That's because such people have been Socially Conditioned to accept hypertech as normal and desirable and to reject mystic Arts as unnatural Reality Deviance.

- A mystic acolyte or cultist does not count as a Sleeper witness at all. Such people accept faith and magick as part of their worldview, and yet – with very few exceptions – have also been raised in a technological environment, with popular media and everyday gadgets that employ advanced (and sometime absurdly exaggerated) scientific principles.

- As a possible exception to that rule, people who've been born and raised in one of the *very* few human communities *that have totally escaped the influence of modern technology* would probably count as Sleeper witnesses with regards to technomagick. No, the Amish don't count; they know that modern tech *exists* but choose to reject it within their society. However, people raised deep in the Amazon interior or who've lived their whole lives in secluded Horizon Realms might qualify if they've had little or no contact with machine-using people.

  On the flipside, though, people who'd had a little bit of experience with machines might be even *more* willing to accept the possibilities of hypertech, as they haven't had much experience or schooling to contradict the more ridiculous applications of technomagick. In such cases, it's the Storyteller's call, based upon the people and situations involved.

Cultural Perspectives and Reality Zones

One man's superstition is another man's everyday life. And so, in certain cultural traditions, activities and practices that may seem impossible on Main Street, USA are perfectly acceptable. This isn't just true only of those developing nations that supposedly have flexible ideas about scientific reality. Plenty of urban enclaves, rural communities, and specialized cultural gatherings (churches, festivals, conventions, etc.) throughout the industrialized world are dominated by Sleepers whose impressions of reality include certain mystic practices, weird technology, and potent martial arts.

For information about the wiggle room afforded by certain cultural perspectives, see ***Part IX: Reality Zones***, at the end of this chapter.

Allies, Assistants, and Cults

Especially where magick is concerned, there's safety in numbers. And so, many mages nurture allies, assistants, and cults – people who, in both story and game terms, make it easier to successfully perform magick.

- *Allies* are associated mages and Night-Folk – members of your Tradition or Convention, collaborators from a different allied faction (the Council, Technocracy, Disparates, etc.), powerful Sleepers (cops, scientists, politicians, etc.), or various non-mages (hedge wizards, vampires, werewolves, and so forth) who share a common cause with you. These allies watch your back, guard your front, and sometimes aid your magickal efforts if and when they can.

- *Assistants* are trained Sleepers who can handle mundane tasks, possibly holding down the fort with various self-powered Wonders. In Technocracy-speak, these are the extraordinary citizens; for the Council, they're acolytes. Regardless of the terminology, these folks provide backup, research, security, companionship, and occasional help with Effects whose practices they understand. Rules-wise, these folks can provide a sympathetic crowd for your magickal Effects... which, in turn, makes those Effects easier to cast, provides extra successes for your roll, and can even make certain vulgar Effects coincidental.

- *Cults* are folks devoted to your cause. Like allies and associates, they take care of business and offer help with magickal workings. Cultists, however, are dedicated specifically to your faction, belief, or Path. Maybe they view you as a prophet or healer, follow the same god(s), or serve the faction to which you both belong. Like assistants, these cultists (who may also be devotees of technology) benefit your Effects in both story and game terms. Unlike more casual associates, however, these characters believe deeply in what you're doing and can provide bonuses to your dice pool when you cast an Effect. See the ***Cult*** Background, detailed in **Chapter Six**, for more information.

Magick's often easier with a little help from your friends. When several characters collaborate on a single Effect, they can act in concert to provide more successes and a lowered difficulty. For details, see the ***Acting in Concert*** section near the end of **Step Three**, (pp. 542-543).

Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects

Because magick is an extension of the mage, a magickal practice often influences – and also depends upon – that mage's mundane skills. A hacker studies computer technology, politics, and various social and governmental institutions. A shaman learns to live off the land, read people and animals, and absorb the culture of his people. A music-focused Ecstatic understands musical theory and instruments, whereas a hypertech inventor perfects scientific theories and hands-on mechanical skill. Such characters typically have at least one dot in the Ability Traits that suit their practices and vocations. In story terms, these abilities define your character's interests and capabilities; in game terms, they help him use a focus with greater results.

If the magickal focus *depends* upon using a given Ability Trait – like channeling magickal Effects through songs, for example – then the Storyteller may insist that the Trait has to be at least equal to the highest Sphere Rank that gets focused through that Ability, as described in **Chapter Six** under ***Minimum Abilities***, (p.276).

As shown in **Chapter Nine**'s ***Magick and Violence*** section, your character's Abilities can lower the difficulty of a magick-casting roll, and his magick can lower the difficulty of his Ability rolls. Most tools and rituals depend upon the successful use of an Ability too – after all, you can't blast an enemy with your force cannon if you don't know how to *shoot* that force cannon, or can't hit your target with a shot!

Naturally, you need to *have* a suitable Ability on your character sheet in order to use it. Later in this chapter, the

Practices section of ***Focus and the Arts*** provides lists of the Abilities associated with certain mystic and technological practices. Assuming that you *do* have the Ability in question, you can employ it in one of two ways:

Abilities Enhancing Magick

When a character uses an appropriate Ability just before working a magickal Effect – and, in game terms, takes at least a turn or two to do so – make a roll to reflect your success with that activity. The difficulty for that roll is the same as the difficulty of the spell you're preparing to attempt. If, for example, Jinx wants to do a Tarot reading to enhance a coincidental Entropy 2 Effect, then the difficulty for both the Perception + Enigmas roll (the Tarot reading) and the spellcasting roll (Entropy 2 + 3 for a coincidental Effect) would be 5.

If you're using an activity to enhance your magick, you cannot spend Willpower to get an automatic success, or use other modifiers to lower the difficulty of that activity roll. In Jinx's case, the Tarot reading's difficulty is 5, period. Each success on the Attribute + Ability roll reduces the difficulty on the associated Effect by -1, to a maximum reduction of -3. If Jinx gets two successes, then her casting roll's difficulty drops by -2.

Magick Enhancing Abilities

The right spell or Procedure can make certain mundane tasks easier, too. A little Mind-magick push, for example, can beef up a facedown or debate. In this case, you cast the magick just before the task and either keep it running throughout the task (see below), or else get the ball rolling with magick and then follow through with straight-up skill.

Game-wise, use the same system as you'd employ when enhancing magick with Abilities: a successful Arete roll lowers the difficulty of the Attribute + Ability roll by a factor of -1 difficulty for each success rolled with your Arete, to a maximum reduction of -3.

In this case, however, you *could* lower the difficulty of that Arete roll. Let's say that Jinx spends a point of Quintessence to lower her difficulty from 5 to 4. If she's using the magick to

Axis of Coincidence

Various examples of coincidence throughout **Mage**'s history have muddied the waters considerably. Correspondence magick, for example, does not summon taxi cabs, nor do whiskey flasks materialize in a person's pocket without a Matter 2/ Prime 2 Effect and several successes rolled to create one from thin air (or a similar, Correspondence-based Effect to move the flask from its location to the pocket). The gray areas between coincidental and vulgar magick might be **Mage**'s most controversial element; with absolutely zero help from **Mage 1st Edition**, arguments about vampiric soap bubbles and taxis from nowhere have surrounded the game for over 20 years. And though no sidebar can conclusively end all arguments, we can present a few guidelines here.

As a general rule, please assume that if a *Hypothetical Average Bystander* (HAB) saw you doing something and that something looked possible under his or her worldview, then your Effect is coincidental. Yes, you could pull a gun or business card from your pocket and have it appear to be coincidence even if there hadn't been one there beforehand. (This, of course, assumes that no one has gone through your pockets or otherwise proved them to be empty. If you've just taken your pants out of the laundry, you can't pull a gun from the front pocket. Also, that gun would still have to be small enough to fit in a pants pocket in the first place; yanking a Desert Eagle from a pair of Daisy Dukes is not gonna fly.) Any conjured object, however, has to either come from *somewhere* via a Correspondence/ Matter Effect or else be created from Matter and Prime Effects... and such acts are often more difficult than carrying that object in the first place – see the **Chapter Nine** section regarding ***The Technological World*** and the creation or invention of sophisticated working objects.

On a related note, conjured objects *do* need to come from somewhere – not-so-random chance will not simply place them in your pocket at the proper time. As an overall guideline, **Mage 20** assumes a *Process-Based Determinism* (PBD), which means that the process you follow determines the results you get.

Returning to the summoned taxi example, a mage would have to:

- Employ the Spheres necessary to grab an existing taxi (maybe Correspondence 3 to find a taxi, Mind 2 to nudge the driver in your direction, and Entropy 2 to tilt the odds of finding a taxi in your favor);
- Employ the Spheres necessary to create a taxi and driver from thin air (Matter 4 to conjure the complicated mix of materials; Forces 3 to propel them using internal combustion and electrical currents and to conjure them from nothing; Life 5/ Mind 5 to create a capable driver; Prime 2 to fuel the entire mess; several dots in various Crafts and Science with specialties in Biology and Human Anatomy; and a metric shit-ton of successes scored on an incredibly vulgar Effect); or...
- Employ Entropy 2 to tilt the odds in your favor; score a *LOT* of successes unless you're in a busy urban area; and expect to be waiting a while before getting whatever happens to arrive.

Merely tossing out a Correspondence 3 teleportation Effect and then hailing a taxi as the coincidence that happens to manifest in time to transport you to your destination will not do the job. (Yes, we know that **Mage 1st Edition** used some really wild examples as coincidences. **Mage 1st**'s magick rules are broken. Please ignore them. Thanks.)

HAB/ HOO/ HYP and RDB/PBD

A popular analogy on the **Mage** forums involves the double axis of *HAB/ HOO/ HYP* on one spectrum, and *RBD/ PBD* on the other. HAB and PBD just got covered above. HOO stands for *Hypothetical Omniscient Observer* (translation: Reality is the ultimate judge of coincidence, can see in your pockets, and has eyes everywhere); RBD means *Result-Based Determinism* (result is the only thing that matters, not how you got that result); and HYP translates to *Harass Yonder Passerby* (which is a joke).

Under HOO, nothing a mage can do counts as a coincidence, because Reality is a godlike observer who judges your activities. And under RBD, you can conjure a taxi from nowhere with a Correspondence spell because the only thing that matters is getting from Point A to Point B. (Mages tend to HYP as a matter of course. Yes, mages can be real dicks.)

Ultimately, you – the players and the Storytellers of individual **Mage** chronicles – provide the final decisions about whether coincidence follows a HAB or HOO model, and whether Effects get decided by RBD or PBD. As far as **Mage 20**'s default position goes, however, our rules favor a HAB/ RBD approach: the Hypothetical Average Bystander decides whether or not something is possible (and she cannot see what you've got in your pocketses), and the results of your Effects depend upon the process you use to make them manifest.

Hopefully, this helps settle a few long-running arguments... around your gaming table, if not on the Internet. (As any Virtual Adept can tell you, *nothing* truly settles arguments on the Internet.)

Successes and Consequences

Another source of endless arguments around **Mage**'s magick has already been addressed above: theoretically, anything is possible if you've got the Spheres, Arete, and imagination to pull it off. What, then, stops mages from conjuring wealth and turning vampires into lawn chairs or soap bubbles?

Successes and consequences.

Yes, a wizard with the Spheres and Abilities listed above could theoretically conjure a taxi and its driver from thin air. That *is* possible. Now, just make a few Crafts rolls (lots of successes – you're building a car); some Science rolls (likewise – you're creating a functional, humanoid life-form, plus a working internal-combustion engine). If all that goes well, then roll 20 or 30 successes on a vulgar Effect (base difficulty 9 if you're in the middle of nowhere, otherwise 10, with a reduction no lower than difficulty 6 if every single factor goes in your favor). Don't botch, incidentally – the potential Paradox backlash could blow you to atoms.

Not that simple, is it?

The same rule runs true on smaller, less obvious complexities... conjuring money, for example. Modern currency is incredibly sophisticated, filled with tiny cues, subtle colors, complex designs, electronic strips, holographic marks, and so forth. You want to make a wad of twenties from thin air? How many successes, exactly, do you think it'll take to craft even *one* passable duplicate of a $20.00 bill? Does your mage have several dots in Crafts and a specialty in Counterfeiting? And if so, which currency has he memorized down to the smallest details? Will that money *feel* right, or will it have a telltale slick, rough, or otherwise unusual texture that would tip off a cashier? Even if you can fool a cashier with that fake cash, do you think a human being's memory can fool a teller machine's cash scanner? Not bloody likely. After all, the Technocracy and other non-mage agencies have worked hard to protect their institutions from influxes of fake cash. Things that sound easy in theory are damned difficult in practice... and thus, they demand phenomenal numbers of successes, often at epic difficulty ratings.

That Which You Do, Returns to You...

On a related note, magick does not happen in a vacuum. Changing one thing dramatically has dramatic effects on other things around it. If you conjure a localized thunderstorm, you also affect the weather patterns on a grand scale. Turn Count Dracula into kitchenware, and his minions will have your ass... and so will *he*, once that spell wears off. Yes, a Hollower can drain a local bank machine; you think the Syndicate won't *notice* that, though, even if she has an Arcane of 5 with which to blur the camera on that ATM? Think some street kid can get away with passing off $100 bills at every store counter? Not in *this* social climate, she can't! Dramatic activities have dramatic blowback, and magick does not shield mages from such consequences. As anyone who studies metaphysics can tell you, it's often quite the opposite.

The obvious (and sometimes not so obvious) effects of Paradox reflect the echoes of a mage's actions. Large, flashy workings get mages slammed to the mat, and smaller ones generate uncanny Resonance or accumulate tiny increments of Paradox until the player abruptly realizes that she's got eight or 10 Paradox points on her sheet. Hypothetical Average Bystanders might be fooled, but Reality will have its due one way or another. Even when cast in low-Paradox environments (Sanctums, Chantries, the Otherworlds), large spells remain challenging. Rolling 20 successes is still difficult, risky, and time-consuming when the difficulty of that roll is 6 instead of 9, and Paradox can still smack you if you screw up in outer space. Beyond Paradox, of course, other consequences still exist, and there's still that matter of scoring enough successes to pull off an Effect to begin with.

A Storyteller is not only *allowed* but also *advised* to use successes and consequences as limiters on abusive levels of magick. The ***Magickal Feats chart*** provides guidelines for drastic acts of reality hacking, so if someone's trying to whip up a basement nuke or turn his co-workers into hordes of screaming minions, the Storyteller has the option of making such feats so difficult and risky that our budding Voldemort is better off trying a more subtle approach to life. Sure, there are times when flashy magick is totally appropriate – the game *is* called **Mage**, after all. By bearing in mind the successes and consequences involved, however, you can keep things from getting out of hand.

assist an activity – perhaps employing Entropy 2 to draw the Strength card from her Tarot deck – then her Arete roll is 4 even though the Perception + Enigmas difficulty is still 5. Each success, of course, reduces that difficulty, though. Jinx scores three successes, and her Tarot-reading difficulty drops to 2.

The ***Dramatic Feats*** section near the beginning of **Chapter Nine** offers a wide range of potentially helpful activities, and the ***Focus and the Arts*** section in this chapter shows how certain feats can provide focus or assistance for a magickal Effect. As mentioned above, certain skills and feats may be required for certain workings; if you want to soup up your car with Forces and Matter, for instance, then you'll have to know how to work on a car.

Step Three: Roll

As we've already seen, you cast an Effect by rolling your Arete rating. At that point, however, various other circumstances determine what your difficulty is and how well you succeed.

Regardless of speed or circumstances, you can make only one Arete roll per turn.

The Difficulty

To reiterate what we've mentioned above, the difficulty of your casting roll depends first upon whether or not your mage is using coincidental magick or vulgar magick, and second whether or not someone's around to notice it when she does.

- *Coincidental magick's* difficulty equals the highest Sphere in that Effect + 3. If you use Forces 2 to make a breeze blow in your direction at just the right time, then the roll's difficulty is 5. (2 + 3 = 5)
- *Vulgar magick WITHOUT Sleeper witnesses* bases its difficulty on the highest Sphere + 4. If you used Forces 2 to make a candle flame fly across the room and into your hand while you were alone, then the difficulty for that feat would be 6. (2 + 4 = 6)
- *Vulgar magick WITH Sleeper witnesses* has a difficulty of the highest Sphere + 5. If you pulled that same flying-flame stunt in front of an unAwakened neighbor, your difficulty would be 7. (2 + 5 = 7)

Minimum Difficulty

The various modifiers described below can raise or lower the difficulty up to three factors in either direction. *No magick-casting roll, however, can go below a difficulty of 3 if the caster's working somewhere on Earth.* Reality has a limited amount of flexibility, and although lower difficulties might be possible in the Otherworlds (Storyteller's discretion), your Arete roll's difficulty will never drop below 3, regardless of the modifiers involved.

Magickal Attack Rolls

Under many circumstances, you simply roll your character's Arete, plus or minus modifiers, to see whether an Effect goes off. If you succeed, then the Effect succeeds as well.

In certain circumstances, though, you need to hit a target who doesn't want to be hit. Perhaps you're firing an energy gun, swinging an enchanted sword, or flinging the archetypal fireball at your intended target of misfortune. In such situations, you also need to roll an attack to hit that person. The *Effect* might succeed, but its *impact* may go elsewhere.

Such circumstances apply to targeted Effects – ones in which you might miss that target or ones that the target of the Effect can dodge. **Chapter Nine** covers such situations, and their appropriate rolls, in the ***Magick and Violence*** section (pp. 413-416) and on the ***Order of Battle chart***, featured on (p. 445).

Fast-Casting and Working Without Tools

A desperate or reckless mage might try *fast-casting* her Effect – that is, making stuff up and firing it off without preparation or practice. On a related note, she might also try working without her usual instruments, trusting sheer force of Will to carry her through.

In both cases, the player suffers a penalty to her Arete roll when casting that Effect – a +1 increase to her difficulty when fast-casting and a +3 increase to her difficulty when working without her usual tools. Again, both modifications can be found on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart***, and both

Appropriate and Opposed Resonance

Two of the modifiers presented on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart*** feature the idea of appropriate and opposed Resonance. Essentially, this means working with things whose energy fits (or do *not* fit) the spell and subject.

As an example, imagine a spell that's intended to comfort a frightened child: using a well-loved teddy bear, a soft security blanket, or a lullaby from the mage's happy childhood would provide appropriate Resonance for the spell in question.

Meanwhile, using a blood-stained blanket from an urban war zone, a lullaby sung by an abusive parent, or the teddy bear clutched in the mage's hands back during the awful days of Daddy's drinking binges would provide opposed Resonance.

Now, some of those items might still be appropriate under certain situations. If that teddy bear was the mage's only comfort during those days, and if the child he's trying to comfort is struggling with family abuse, the old stuffed animal might still provide an appropriate focus for that spell. And so, the difference between appropriate and opposed has more to do with the story elements than with an arbitrary list of items that are good or bad for particular sorts of workings.

For more details about the effects of Resonance, see ***Resonance and Synergy***, (pp. 560-561).

affect any mage who has not raised her Arete high enough to work without a focus, as described in the entry ***Arete, Focus, and Instruments***, **Chapter Six**, (p. 329).

Modifiers

As the last few chapters have shown, various modifiers reflect circumstances that make a task more or less difficult. On the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart*** on (p. 503), you'll find a collection of modifiers that reflect ***Tools and Rituals***, matters of ***Time and Effort***, and a host of ***General Circumstances*** that can help or hinder a mage's work.

Modifier Limits

As that chart points out, no collection of modifiers can raise a difficulty by more than +3, lower that difficulty by more than -3, or bring the difficulty of a magickal Effect below 3 if that Effect gets cast on Earth.

The Thresholds Option

If your group employs the ***thresholds*** option described in **Chapter Eight** (p. 387), then you'll be setting your maximum difficulties at 9 instead of 10. In such cases, then, a modifier that would push the difficulty to 10 or beyond that point will instead present a threshold of successes. Each +1 to the difficulty equals one additional success that you need to roll in order to clear that threshold.

Let's say that your modifiers add +3 to your difficulty and that those additions take the difficulty to 11. Because 11 is two more than 9, you get a threshold of two. To beat that threshold, you need to roll at least three successes at difficulty 9 – the first one to reach the difficulty, the next two to beat that threshold.

This option works best when you've got an incredibly challenging task and the time and space to work on it properly. For quick-result spells, threshold successes can be unnecessarily complex. Use the option only when you need to do so.

Difficulties Above 10

Even if your group chooses not to employ thresholds, you'll still add extra successes when a modifier pushes the difficulty above 10. Each +1 modifier adds another success that you need to roll before you succeed.

If, for instance, Lee Ann tries to use Time 5 to travel back in time in front of witnesses, that would add a +3 modifier to that difficulty 10 Effect. In game terms, that would demand *a minimum of three extra successes* at difficulty 10, over and above the other successes necessary to accomplish that feat. The mathematical absurdities involved in that roll show why mages so rarely attempt such feats... and why they even *more* rarely succeed when they do.

Using Willpower

Will drives magick. When you throw a point of Willpower behind a spell, your character gets one automatic success on the Effect in question.

As detailed in the ***Chapter Six*** entry ***Willpower***, spending this Trait involves points of *temporary* Willpower, not *permanent* Willpower. Essentially, you're pushing the limits of reality by investing part of your character's determination to succeed. In order to do so, however, you have to declare the Willpower expenditure *before* you roll your Arete. Once you've made that roll, you cannot add more successes to it by spending Willpower to make things happen.

A mage may spend only one Willpower point per turn when casting an Effect.

Using Quintessence

As the essential energy of Creation, Quintessence fuels magickal Effects. A mage can spend one point of her personal Quintessence per turn for each dot in her Avatar background Trait. As the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart*** shows, you can spend points of Quintessence to reduce the difficulty of your character's magickal Effects.

Adjusting Arete Roll Difficulties

As usual, the final difficulty of a single Arete roll can be reduced by a maximum of -3 (or three points of Quintessence). That said, you could spend additional points in order to balance out other modifiers; if, for example, you had a +2 addition to your difficulty and an Avatar Background of 5, you could spend up to five points of Quintessence in order to drop that difficulty by -3, canceling out the +2 and reducing the difficulty by -3 as well.

Other Uses for Quintessence in Magick

Quintessence has other potential uses as well:

- Reinforcing the Pattern of an object so that it resists or inflicts aggravated damage.
- Fueling new Patterns so that Life, Forces, and Matter can be created from scratch.
- Facilitating the many uses of the Prime Sphere.

In certain cases – such as adding the ability to inflict aggravated damage to something that doesn't normally do that – you must spend a point or more of Quintessence in order to complete that Effect. In all cases that don't involve Prime 3 or higher, however, you can spend only one point of Quintessence for each dot in your Avatar. Beyond that, a mage must rely upon Prime Sphere Effects.

Successes

Brief, simple spells are easy to cast; larger, more complicated magicks take time and effort. As the ***Magickal Feats chart*** shows, it's easier to cast a simple Effect on yourself than it is to rock someone else's world with powerful magicks.

Base Successes

For a simple guideline, assume that you'll need a certain number of successes before your Effect manifests:

- *Personal Effects* that make minor changes in your character's own reality require only one success. These include sensory-perception enhancements, divinations, self-healing, temporary Trait boosts, minor cosmetic changes (hair color, skin color, height, etc.) and the like. Extreme or long-lasting alterations – radical shape changes, multiple selves, transformations into elemental forces, and so forth – require three successes or more.
- *Effects that change reality for another person or object* require at least two successes. For this reason, a single success inflicts no damage upon an opponent – damage begins at two successes. An unwilling target can also try to resist or dodge an attack, as detailed under the ***Dodging and Resistance*** entry below. In order to get around that resistance, you might need to roll additional successes; the more successes you roll, the more damage you inflict. (See ***Damage and Duration***, also below.)
- *Effects that significantly change your surroundings*, even if that's only on a local level, require at least five successes. Large-scale alterations can demand 10, 20, even 30 successes, whereas small and subtle ones are much easier to achieve.

Magickal Feats

Especially ambitious or complicated Effects take longer to cast and demand more effort in the process. For such workings, consult the ***Magickal Feats chart*** and find the number of successes you'll probably need in order to achieve the desired Effect.

To gather those successes, an extended roll – in story terms, a ritual – could be essential. The ***Rituals, Rolls, and Extended Successes*** entry, below, describes the process of rolling large numbers of successes and the various complications and consequences that can result when you try to bend reality on an epic scale.

Degrees of Success

Most Effects are fairly straightforward. Conjuring fire, changing your shape, downloading your consciousness into the Digital Web... such things either happen or they don't. The ***Base Damage or Duration chart*** presents the basic amounts of damage that a given spell inflicts, or the length of time that a given Effect lasts, based upon the roll of your dice.

Other Effects, however, might succeed only partially or succeed beyond your expectations. In such cases, use the ***Degrees of Success chart*** to find out how well your mage managed the Effect in question. If she fell short of her goal or had to stop in the middle of a ritual (see below), then she could either accept an imperfect spell or try to pick things up again later. If she succeeded beyond her expectations, the Storyteller owes her a bonus of some kind, based upon the attempted Effect and the circumstances surrounding the caster, spell, and subject of the Effect.

Picking Up Where You Left Off

After casting an imperfect Effect or falling short of her initial plans, a mage can pick up where she left off by making another roll at +1 to the original difficulty. In story terms, she grits her teeth, regroups, and gives it the old (wizard) college try once again.

Optional Rules

The following *optional rules* offer complex possibilities for your chronicle. Use them or avoid them as your group sees fit.

Dividing Successes

As per **Mage Revised**, the Storyteller may decide to let a player divide up her successes between *Targets*, *Damage*, and *Duration*. At the price of some extra complication, this option allows you to customize certain elements of your magickal Effects.

For each success above the Base Successes, the player could place one success into one of the following categories:

- **Targets:** Assuming that a basic Effect reaches one subject, this option allows you to affect one additional subject for each success you put into Targets. If you wanted to affect three people, for example, you'd put two successes into Targets.

  This option doesn't apply to area-effect workings like explosions, songs, or TV broadcasts; such things affect large numbers of people and objects by default. For single-person Effects, however – stepping sideways, healing spells, and so on – the Target option lets you help or hinder several characters at once.

- **Damage:** Normally, your Effects inflict damage based upon the numbers of successes you roll, as described under ***Damage and Duration*** in **Step Four** and the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***. If you choose to divide up your successes, however, then you have no "default" damage – every level of damage must be "purchased" with successes.

  Each success you put into Damage allows you to inflict two health levels of damage on your subject. Depending upon the Sphere you're using, that damage might be bashing, lethal or aggravated – see the ***Magickal Damage chart*** for details.

- **Duration:** Like Damage, Duration is usually based upon your roll. If you choose to divide up your successes, though, your Effect takes place immediately, and doesn't last beyond the next turn.

  To add Duration to your Effect, you can throw additional successes into this category. Each success used this way adds one level to the Effect's Duration; see the ***Optional Dividing Success Rule chart*** to find the available levels **(p. 504)**.

  Alternately, you could decide to spend several successes on a single level of Duration – say, spending three successes to create an Effect that takes place once per scene for the next three consecutive scenes. This choice comes in handy for one of this option's nastier applications...

Time-Release Damage

Normally, damage is instantaneous. By adding Duration to Damage, however, you can cast time-release Effects – poison, curses, pain spells and so on – whose harm continues over consecutive intervals.

Each interval costs a certain number of successes:

- Each Scene interval = one success
- Each day interval = two successes
- Each story interval = three successes
- Each six-month interval = four successes

Time-release spells can be dispelled with appropriate ***Countermagick***. See the entry of that name, **(pp. 545-546)**, for details.

Dividing Successes in Advance

If the mage wants to spread things around before she casts an Effect, the player must add up the successes needed and then use that as her Base Successes.

If, for example, you wanted to hit three Targets for six health levels of Damage, then you'd need to add five successes (one for each additional Target beyond the first, plus one for every two health levels of Damage) to your Base of two successes – giving you a total of seven successes you need to roll in order to get the Effect you want.

For a quick-reference overview of this option, again see the ***Optional Dividing Success Rule chart***.

For situations in which you try again due to a failed roll – or try again *and* fail the roll – check out the ***Failed Rolls*** entry below. In other cases, an extended roll might be in order... and for those situations, again see the ***Rituals, Rolls, and Extended Successes*** entry below.

Rituals, Rolls, and Extended Successes

By definition, *ritual* refers to a practiced sequence of events with a desired end. Glaring at a person and making her burst into flames is not a ritual, but shaking a burnt bone in

Optional Rules (Continued)

Automatic Successes

Skillful mages can do simple things with little effort. To reflect that ease, the Storyteller might let a character perform simple spells without having the player roll for that Effect.

Like the ***automatic success*** rule described in **Chapter Eight**, this option requires a dice pool that's at least equal to the task at hand. In this case, that means an Arete Trait of the appropriate Sphere +3. So long as the trick in question doesn't stir up a fuss or make some huge difference in the course of the story, the mage can pull off small coincidences – enhancing her senses, changing her eye color, pulling a business card out of her pocket, etc. – without rolling for success.

Obviously, if the trick *does* involve some complex or vital activity – creating a gun out of thin air, just happening to find a Big Mac in the middle of the desert, and so forth – then the player should have to roll for the Effect as usual. This option reflects simple, practiced tricks, not life-changing alterations of reality.

For obvious reasons, this option should not be used with vulgar magick, only for coincidental Effects. That said, it's worth noting that Sanctums, Chantries, Realms, and the Otherworlds often accept certain magickal practices as coincidental. On his home turf, then, an accomplished mage might be able to do things that would normally be considered vulgar magick – like igniting a roomful of candles with a wave of his hand, stirring a pot without touching the spoon, or getting a book to float off the shelf and onto the table – without rolling for the Effect. Such tricks are colorful reflections of a wizard's power and could be considered part of the landscape in a personal Sanctum, home Chantry, or dedicated Horizon Realm where the mage in question has keyed the local reality to conform to his Arts. (For details, see the section about ***The Otherworlds*** in **Chapter Nine**, as well as the Backgrounds ***Chantry*** and ***Sanctum***, both in **Chapter Six**.)

For equally obvious reasons, this option should not apply to combat-based rolls.

The Domino Effect

After a certain point, the idea of coincidence wears thin. If mages are throwing around unlikely events in quick succession, then this *optional rule* might come into play.

For every two wild coincidences within a single scene, the Storyteller may add +1 to the difficulty of subsequent coincidences. This penalty adds up, too: +2 difficulty after five coincidences, +3 after seven, and so on. To be fair, however, the penalty should come in only when those coincidences affect the scene in noticeable ways: exploding gas mains, unlikely ricochets, unexpected appearances of the police... that sort of thing. Personal Effects that no one knows about except the mage who cast them (sensory enhancements, minor Trait boosts, etc.) should remain immune to this domino effect.

her direction while tossing a handful of ashes and invoking Chango *would* be a ritual.

Essentially, a ritual allows you to roll until you get the number of successes your mage's Effect requires. In game terms, a ritual might involve extended rolls, several turns, and a series of actions, possibly with several different tools involved. No Hermetic wizard, for example, would dare summon an angel without the proper sigils, purifications, invocations, and ceremonial instruments. Some rituals involve brief activity, and others can take hours or even days. The optional ***Rite, Ceremony, and Great Work*** rule (see below) reflects the different time periods a ritual might require, as well as the rolls and successes involved in such rituals.

What Does a Ritual Look Like?

For game purposes, a ritual involves any kind of extended process that requires several rolls, has a focus, and produces a magickal Effect. Despite the word's religious connotations, that ritual doesn't have to be mystical; a LAN party, a musical concert, an extended programming session, the loving care devoted to restoring an old car or inventing a new gadget... for our purposes here, they're all rituals.

The ritual in question can be solitary (like a series of katas, a deep meditation, the R&D process for a glorious machine) or communal (a play, a rave, the ignition of a gigantic statue in the middle of a desert). The *focus* element, however, is essential. A ritual involves intention (the goal of that rite), practice (the activity that fulfills that goal), and the appropriate instruments (the tools – from wrenches or computers to elaborate masquerades or intricate designs – used to turn that intention into a reality) for the practice in question.

Coincidental and Vulgar Rituals

Are rituals coincidental? They *can* be, especially when the shape and Effects involved with the ritual dovetail with the beliefs of a given culture or subculture... and *most* especially when people from that culture form a congregation for the ritual itself. Essentially, those people – even when they're Sleepers – add their faith to the ritual's power, making it coincidental except in the most obviously vulgar kind of applications. Getting a Catholic congregation to accept a small miracle during High Mass is coincidental; ripping open the Gauntlet and letting a demon horde pour through it, on the other hand, is vulgar even if you do it in the middle of an Electric Hellfire Club reunion.

In many cases, the dividing line between a coincidental rite and a vulgar one depends upon the dressing involved in that particular ritual. A tech-based ritual – a demo, an experiment, a rock concert, a launch party for some new software – tends to be coincidental unless it folds, spindles, and mutilates the laws of physics... and occasionally even then. (What *was* the Space Race of the 1960s if not a series of Technocratic rituals bents on transforming human beliefs about possibility?) Mystic rituals are trickier, balancing the abstract concepts of the faithful with the experiences of a Sleeper's daily reality. ("*Sure, I believe in angels... but did you SEE that fucking thing?*") Even then, however, a rite can push the edges of what people accept as possible. You might not be able to conjure a raging hellbeast without risking heavy Paradox, but if you can make it seem like cool theatrics, then you might just get away with passing it off as special effects during an especially wild Black Metal show. (Once it starts eating the audience, however, you have a problem...)

It's worth noting that rituals cast by a mage within her dedicated Sanctum are almost always coincidental, so long as they follow the set of reality inside that space. A Nordic Verbena could call up some powerful Effects using *ser i* shamanic rites; if she brings in a computer, though, such heresy probably won't go down well with the Old Gods watching over her ritual grove.

Base Difficulty

As usual, a ritual's base difficulty depends upon the highest Sphere involved in the Effect, plus the modifiers for coincidental or vulgar magick. Other modifiers – for tools, Quintessence, allies, and so forth – will probably reduce that difficulty. The ritual's base, however, is that difficulty *before any modifiers have been applied*... and when you're figuring out the difficulties for Stamina rolls and mundane activities (see below), that base is the difficulty that you'll use.

Maximum Rolls

Rituals take a lot of energy. Mentally and physically, keeping the kind of attention and intention a ritual needs is pretty draining. Even with a group of faithful allies working together – and lowering the difficulty of the rolls involved – the mage in charge of the ritual will wear out sometime.

As a result, the maximum number of rolls you can make during your ritual is equal to your permanent Willpower Trait plus your Arete. An houngan with a Willpower of 7 and an Arete of 4 could make 11 rolls (7 Willpower + 4 Arete = 11) in the course of his ritual to court Shango's blessing before he has given that rite everything he has to give.

Note that the number of rolls is independent of the number of hours your mage spends performing the ritual. See ***Rituals and Stamina***, below, for more about how long your mage can keep this ritual stuff up.

Simultaneous Effects During Rituals

As noted under the heading Instant Effects and Rituals, (p. 529), a ritual demands intense concentration. With the exception of Rank 1 sensory Effects, or perhaps a Mind or Entropy Effect that sways an audience or tilts odds in your favor, a mage cannot use more than two Effects at once while he's casting a ritual.

If a mage *does* choose to juggle two different Effects during a ritual, then that second Effect adds +1 to the ritual's difficulty. Please note that this applies only to *different* Effects (like a Mind spell cast to influence a congregation during a larger ceremony), *not to different Spheres being used within the SAME Effect*.

Failed Rolls

Aside from the potential benefits of coincidence (shown above), a ritual's primary purpose in game terms involves the ability to use extended rolls to create bigger Effects. On the good side, an extended roll can help you assemble a large number of successes; on the not-so-good side, it also gives you plenty of opportunities to fail or botch a roll. Each new roll presents a risk of failure and potential catastrophe.

If you fail a roll – that is, you get no successes that turn – then you may still continue rolling in subsequent turns. Each failed roll, however, adds +1 to the difficulty of those subsequent rolls. Fail one roll, it's +1; fail two rolls, and it's +2... and so it goes until you either complete the Effect, fail completely, or botch a roll.

If the difficulty reaches 9 and you fail another roll and acquire a new penalty, then the new penalties become thresholds: a +1 difficulty adds one more success to the total you need, a +2 difficulty adds two more successes, and so on. By that point, your mage is risking disaster, and it's probably best to stop the process and regroup than it is to press forward – see ***Rituals and Paradox***, below.

Botched Rolls

If you roll a botch during a ritual, you may spend one turn, a temporary Willpower point, and one previously rolled success in order to keep the whole thing from blowing up in your face.

At this point, your mage is holding the ritual together through sheer determination. You can either stop there or else keep going with a +1 increase to your difficulty. A second botch, however, spells immediate disaster... again, see ***Rituals and Paradox***.

Interference

If an outside party disrupts a ritual – say, by attacking the rite or distracting the caster – then the mage in charge of that ritual must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 8, or else botch the entire deal. If she successfully keeps things together, the ritual proceeds as if there had been a botch rolled; a second turn of interference brings the hammer down and the ritual to a crashing halt.

Rituals and Paradox

Magickal rituals stir up a lot of reality. And so, every roll after the first one adds one point of Paradox to the caster's total. If the ritual concludes successfully, then those extra points of Paradox go away. If the caster botches the ritual, however, then the Paradox backlash adds those additional points of Paradox onto the Paradox that the mage would suffer to begin with.

Let's say you made three rolls as part of your ritual; those three rolls add two points to your Paradox pool – one for each roll after the first. If the Effect succeeds, then those two points disappear. If you botch a roll during the casting of that Effect, however, those two points get counted toward the Paradox backlash. (For details, see ***Part IV: The Paradox Effect***.)

Paradox point accumulation does not reset after a botch; once you botch and take those two points, you can continue at +1 difficulty (see above), but you would take three Paradox points in the next turn, then four after that, and so on.

Rituals and Stamina

Extended rites are exhausting. As a general rule, assume that a character may work for one hour without penalty for each dot in his Stamina Trait. After that, you'll need to make a Stamina roll for each subsequent hour... and the difficulty for that roll is the base difficulty of the ritual itself.

A successful roll allows the mage to go on for another hour; the second roll suffers a +1 penalty to its difficulty; the third suffers a +2 penalty, and so on.

A failed roll means that exhaustion has set in. At that point, you can either call off the ritual or spend a point of Willpower to keep going. If you keep going, the next Stamina roll suffers a +3 penalty as above... after all, your mage is seriously running out of steam!

A botched Stamina roll counts as ***Interference***, above. In story terms, the mage starts fumbling around in a daze and must struggle to keep the rite from ending in catastrophe. For obvious reasons, then, long rituals can be extremely dangerous affairs.

Rituals and Mundane Abilities

By their nature, rituals tend to employ mundane Abilities – Art, Computer, Esoterica, Technology, and so forth. In story terms, the activity provides the focus for that ritual; and in game terms, the Attribute + Ability roll lowers the difficulty of the rite.

As described above, under ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects***, each success with a mundane activity roll reduces the Arete roll difficulty by -1, to a maximum reduction of -3. The difficulty for that roll is the base difficulty for the ritual itself.

For more details, see that ***Mundane Skills and Magickal Effects*** entry; for potential ritual activities and tools, see ***Focus and the Arts***, later in this chapter.

Optional Rule: Rite, Ceremony, and Great Work

As an *optional rule*, you could break rituals down into three categories, each one reflecting a certain investment of time and effort:

- A *brief rite* (one to five successes) reflects a short observance: a song, a quick prayer, activating a mechanical sequence, sticking pins in a doll, that sort of thing. Game-wise, this involves one or two rolls and five minutes or less of story time. Magick-wise, the rite conjures a simple Effect through either a focus or sheer force of Will, depending on the mage's abilities. More involved Effects require...

- A *ceremony* (five to 10 successes), which commits time and effort to the casting of an Effect. A mass, a concert, a session in the workshop, a trance, a series of katas, an evening of debauchery – such things count as ceremonies. The ceremony doesn't have to be a social event but can involve solitary practice as well as a communal gathering. In game terms, each Arete roll performed within a ceremony reflects an hour or so in story time and may run for up to five hours, after which it becomes...

- A *Great Work* (10 successes or more) – a serious devotion to the Effect at hand. High Ritual invocations often involve Great Works, as do mechanical inventions, major spiritual observances, alchemical research, festivals, and other forms of hard time in the lab, workshop, dojo, or temple. Game-wise, each Great Work roll reflects five hours of commitment to the task, which can run as long as it needs to before the mage either reaches his goal, fails horribly, or hits the end of his endurance, as shown under ***Rituals and Stamina*** and ***Maximum Rolls***. A major investment of time, materials, effort, and skill, a Great Work is the sort of thing mages do when they're trying to move the world.

Taking Breaks During a Great Work

Great Works aren't usually one-sitting projects. A mage could spend days, weeks, or longer dedicating himself to a Great Work. In game terms, you may consider the *option* of stopping for a break during a Great Work, hanging the process by spending a Willpower point and then resuming the effort after a short interval.

To pick up where you left off, make a Wits + Esoterica roll (or Wits + Technology for acts of enlightened hypertech). That roll's difficulty begins at the ritual's base difficulty (no modifiers allowed), and then goes up by +1 for each break taken after the first one. So long as the work area remains undisturbed, and no more than 48 hours pass between sessions with the Great Work, the mage may continue to extend the process. One failed roll, however, ruins the process and forces the mage to begin again... which explains why so many Great Works take a long time to perform.

Acting in Concert

So you've got some helpers while you're casting that ritual. What does that mean in game terms? As we saw above, a sympathetic crowd can make a ritual feel coincidental, and assistants can lower the difficulty for a magickal Effect. Allied mages can also help out by acting in concert with the caster, and a ***Cult*** (as in the Background Trait of that name) adds to the caster's dice pool. In short, then, a group ritual can be incredibly beneficial, provided that you're willing to deal with the increased risks and potential complications of getting a bunch of people to cooperate on an important project.

Common Ground

When several characters collaborate within a single ritual, they must all share a certain amount of common ground:

- Each mage involved must have at least one dot in each of the Spheres involved in the ritual's Effect. You can't help someone summon a cyclone, after all, if you don't understand elemental Forces.

- All participants must remain in contact with one another for the duration of the ritual, able to communicate freely through whatever means work best for them: telepathy, speech, Instant Messaging, texting, etc.

- Those participants need to work out a shared approach to the ritual; after all, an Etherite in a shamanic rite will probably do more harm than good. That said, mages from distinct yet allied groups – differing Traditions or Technocratic Conventions – can certainly collaborate if they approach one another's practices with respect and attention. Story-wise, those collaborators need to hash out some common cues and protocols... which, in game terms, will probably involve a few social feat rolls before all is said and done. Once they've established a common base to work from, the allies can focus their intentions through a shared ritual.

The Collaborators

Coordinating a large ritual may demand several hours of prep time. Once everything has been established, though, the casting group can work together in one of two ways:

- *Equal Collaborators* – that is, mages who are more or less on the same level as the primary caster – can roll their Arete and then add their successes toward the success of the ritual as a whole. The Effect's normal difficulty and modifiers apply equally to all such collaborators.

- *Enlightened assistants* – that is, mages with less knowledge and experience than the primary caster – add one automatic success to the Effect, up to a maximum of five successes, total. These successes, however, *DO NOT APPLY to cancel out a botch*. If the caster botches the roll, then those assistants' successes disappear. The additional successes count only to enhance a successful Effect.

  Only one option may be used at a time – *not both*.

UnAwakened Assistants

Acolytes, cultists, citizens, and so forth can add certain benefits to the ritual as well:

- The ***Cult*** Background adds one die to the caster's dice pool, up to a maximum of five dice. And yes, those extra dice may also help to botch a casting roll – cults can screw things up as well as help things along.

- If you've got over 100 people involved, certain vulgar Effects (summonings, gateways, raisings of the dead, and so forth) may be considered coincidental *if there are no other witnesses around to contradict that impression*. A solitary rite on the Moors is far more effective in that regard than a concert in a nightclub downtown.

Downsides and Risks

It's not all roses, of course. The downsides of collaboration include the difficulty of wrangling several people toward a common goal (especially if they don't share a common belief system); coordinating logistics for large gatherings (which usually requires time, work, space, and often money); and the potential to screw up on a grand scale. Grand, as in if one caster botches a casting roll (see below), every participant suffers the Paradox, either by adding the Paradox points to their individual pools or by enduring a large-scale blast that affects *everyone* – Awakened and otherwise – who happens to be near Ground Zero at the time.

Despite the risks and costs, collaboration provides a sense of security and fellowship. Solitary rites *do* have their own kind of significance, but we humans tend to be sociable by nature, and our group rituals – magickal and otherwise – transform the potential of one into the power of many.

Step Four: Results

The dice have been cast. What happens now? In **Step Four**, we cover the effects of your mage's spell. Game-wise, those effects are based on the number of successes you roll. The more successes you get, the more potent your reality-bending Effect will be.

Range

As mentioned under the ***Divided Successes*** option (see the ***Optional Rules*** sidebar), a typical Effect affects one target within the caster's clear sensory range. If you choose not to use that option, simply assume that you can affect one target per success if the spell you cast is capable of affecting several targets at once... a sleep spell, for instance, rather than a healing spell. Specifically targeted spells (mind control, curses, transformations, etc.) reach only one target at a time. Area-effect workings –explosions, broadcasts, storms, and so on – reach everyone within the area of that feat.

A target on the fringes of the mage's sensory range (under cover, far away, obscured by fog or forest) increases the difficulty of the caster's Arete roll by +1. A mage with Correspondence 3 or better can expand her sensory range rather dramatically, as shown on the ***Correspondence Ranges chart***. That mage's familiarity with expanded perceptions allows her to ignore that penalty; all other mages, however, must take it into account.

If your target is out of sight, behind barriers, or otherwise beyond the normal reach of your senses, then you must use the Correspondence Sphere in order to reach him. A song might affect someone who can't see the singer, for example, but it won't reach someone who cannot hear it unless the singing mage adds a Correspondence Effect to connect the song to its intended target. (For details, see the entry right below this one.)

Damage and Duration

Unless you're using the ***Divided Successes*** option, an Effect that inflicts damage follows the ***Damage or Duration chart***. Healing spells work the same way, repairing lost health levels at the same rate that an attack spell takes health levels away.

Like damage, an Effect's duration is based upon the successes you roll; the better you roll, the longer your spell lasts. This applies, of course, to spells that could potentially last a while – charms, enhanced perceptions, shape-changing, and so forth. Damage-based attacks tend to be immediate, whereas attacks that change the target without causing health level injuries follow the Duration part of the ***Damage or Duration chart***.

As mentioned on that chart, you can either inflict immediate damage (in which case Duration is one turn) or else cast a spell that lasts awhile (in which case Damage is zero). The only way to inflict damage over a period of time involves the ***Divided Successes*** option.

Spheres and Damage

As noted on the ***Magickal Damage chart***:

- *Correspondence* does not inflict damage at all unless it's coupled with another Sphere (like using Life 3/ Correspondence 3 to teleport a person into several different destinations at once) or used to drop a target into an unfortunate location (like an active volcano). Such attacks tend to be extremely vulgar and usually cause aggravated damage.
- *Entropy* Sphere attacks cannot inflict direct damage at all until Rank 4, after which point they inflict aggravated damage by disintegrating the target's Pattern. (Entropy-based indirect attacks, like falling walls or speeding cars, inflict damage as ***Environmental Hazards***; see that section in **Chapter Nine** for details.)
- *Forces* Sphere attacks inflict one extra success of damage. That damage is often lethal, although wind-based attacks inflict bashing damage, and fire or electricity-based attacks inflict aggravated damage.
- Vulgar *Life*-based attacks inflict aggravated damage; *coincidental* ones inflict lethal damage.
- *Mind*-based attacks inflict bashing damage, unless the caster adds Prime 2 and a point of Quintessence to make an attack aggravated.
- Vulgar *Prime* attacks inflict aggravated damage. Prime 2, plus a point of Quintessence, allows the caster to make any Sphere's damage aggravated, and Prime 3 lets him attack with a weapon or blast composed of pure Quintessence energy.
- *Matter and Spirit* inflict lethal damage unless they're augmented with Prime 2 and Quintessence.
- *Time* does not inflict damage unless it's combined with Matter (to age objects) or Life (to age living things). In such cases, it inflicts damage through enhanced decrepitude.

Sphere-Specific Effects

Certain Spheres have specialized elements and results. Those results apply whenever these Spheres get used in an Effect. A witch skilled in Correspondence and Time, for instance, can use the ***Correspondence Ranges chart*** to look at a faraway place and the ***Time Sphere Timelines chart*** to look back at that area's past.

If you're not using those Spheres, then just stick to the usual rules.

Correspondence Ranges

Correspondence Effects, as noted in the text, reach beyond usual spatial boundaries. Like Damage and Duration, that Range depends upon the number of successes you roll. To find out just how far such Effects can reach, check the ***Correspondence Ranges chart***.

If the caster has a certain connection to the subject of his spell or has been using an object, place, or person that's related to the subject, it's easier to use Correspondence magick as a bridge between the caster and the subject. The closer your connection, the fewer successes you need in order to reach out and affect your target.

As noted on the ***Correspondence Sphere*** entry, an Effect that combines Correspondence with another Sphere is limited to the dots you have in the Correspondence Sphere. You cannot, for example, use Forces 5/ Correspondence 2/ Prime 2 to blow up the moon; in order to attack such a remote target with such a potent assault, you would need Correspondence 5 and a *lot* of successes. (Just for the record, that's a *seriously* vulgar Effect, too.)

Spirit Magick and the Gauntlet

Because Spirit-based Effects often have to cross the Gauntlet, the difficulty for such Effects depends upon what you're trying to do:

- Spirit Effects cast against someone on the same side of the Gauntlet have a difficulty based on the highest Sphere + the usual *coincidental*, *vulgar*, or *vulgar with witnesses* modifiers.
- To cast Spirit Effects across the Gauntlet, check the ***Gauntlet Ratings chart*** to find the difficulty of your spell.
- If the Avatar Storm is still raging, then a mage reaching across the Gauntlet with anything more than his perceptions or an astral form might wind up taking damage. See the ***Otherworlds*** section of **Chapter Nine** for details.

Time Sphere Reach

With the Time Sphere, a mage can reach across spans of time. In this case, use the ***Time Sphere Timelines chart***. As usual, the number of successes determines how effective the spell will be.

Important note: That chart shows the span of time your mage can look into the future or past, *NOT* the length of time that a Time-based spell endures. Despite common misconception, a spell's Duration – even the Duration of a Time-based Effect – is based upon the ***Damage and Duration*** rules, not upon the ***Time Sphere Timelines chart***.

Certain vulgar Time Effects can also speed or slow the passage of time, even possibly rewind events or age targets out of existence. For such situations, use the ***Feats of Time Magick chart***, right below the ***Time Sphere Timelines*** one.

- If several different Spheres have been combined into an Effect, then the damage is based on *the most destructive Sphere involved*. A Life/ Time Effect, for example, would deal out aggravated damage. You cannot stack damage by combining Spheres – only the most devastating Sphere counts.

Dodging and Resistance

Generally, a successful Arete roll equals a successful attack. Immediate effect, however, isn't always the case:

Dodging a Physical Attack

Any physical attack (fireball, mystic blade, plasma bolt, etc.) directed at an essentially solid target (car, person, spirit, etc.) can be dodged if that target is capable of dodging the attack in question.

As detailed under **Chapter Nine's *Combat*** section, a Dexterity + Athletics (or Acrobatics) roll, difficulty 6, subtracts successes from an incoming attack. If the attacker still has more successes than the target, remaining successes determine how much damage is done... and if the attacker winds up with only one success left over, then there's no damage at all.

Really obvious attacks – lightning bolts, clouds of deadly gas, and so forth – are easy to see coming. Invisible ones – flesh-eating spirits, silent curses, Entropic ripples that collapse a bridge, that sort of thing – may be detected with a successful Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 8.

Resisting Psychic Assaults

Mind-control spells, mental commands, Social Conditioning, and so forth can be resisted by an unwilling target if she's aware that she's under attack. In such cases, a Willpower roll, difficulty 6, acts as the dodge for that assault, subtracting successes from the aggressor's roll. If the character isn't aware of that attack, however, she suffers the full Effect... which is the primary reason that Mind-savvy mages prefer to be subtle ("*You have beautiful eyes...*") rather than overt ("*You are in my power...*").

Soaking Damage from Magickal Attacks

Magickal attacks that unleash physical force – blades, bolts, storms, etc. – can be soaked like any other physical damage. The usual rules, presented in **Chapter Nine**, apply when soaking damage.

All-out Reality-fucking, however, is hard to endure. Vulgar attacks of pure reality-alteration power (curses, transmutations, possession, etc.) cannot be soaked unless the target has *countermagick* or some other specific protection against the Effect in question.

Mental attacks can be resisted, as shown above, but they cannot normally be soaked. A Mind-based blast of psychic trauma hurts... a *LOT*.

Countermagick

Magick-using characters can deploy countermagick to resist reality-warping effects. Essentially, the target dodges the Effect with her Awakened reflexes and her understanding of the Spheres. Countermagick counts as a full action; you can abort a previously planned action to employ countermagick, but you cannot use it if you've already acted within the turn. As with a dodge, each success scored on a countermagick roll removes one success from an assailant's casting roll.

True countermagick allows for several different *optional rules* variations, as shown below. To employ such advanced countermagick, a character has to be an Awakened mage. However, other characters – Night-Folk, hedge magicians and people with the ***True Faith Merit*** – can employ a sort of basic countermagick that's based on their innate capabilities. (See the sidebar nearby.) Either way, countermagick reduces a mage's ability to harm her target. The story-based techniques differ from character to character, but the rules remain the same.

Basic Countermagick

- **Sphere Knowledge:** To oppose another character's Effect, you need to have at least one dot in at least one of the Spheres that are being used to attack you. You can't resist a Forces-based assault, for example, if you don't understand Forces.

- **The Roll:** Assuming you have the essential Sphere(s), make an Arete roll. In **Mage 2nd**, the difficulty for that roll is 7. (Under the Reckoning metaplot in **Mage Revised**, it's 8.) We suggest leaving the difficulty at 7.

- **Successes:** Each success rolled deducts one success from the attacker's successes. If the incoming Effect's results were based upon the ***Magickal Feats chart***, then the incoming spell is less effective than it would have been otherwise – see the ***Degrees of Success chart*** instead. If that attack depended upon a certain number of successes, the assault fizzles completely.

Innate Countermagick

Certain characters or materials possess innate countermagick. The Technocratic material Primium, for example, automatically provides a countermagick roll. Characters or machines with innate countermagick don't have to use an action to deploy the protection – it's just an intrinsic part of who or what they are.

Protective or Offensive Countermagick (Optional)

Although countermagick usually deals only with attacks upon the mage in question, a skillful mage can try to intercept an attack that's aimed at someone else. Such protective or offensive countermagick still requires at least one dot in a Sphere from the attacking Effect, and demands a full action to cast. This type of countermagick, however, also requires at least one dot in the Prime Sphere, too, plus one point of Quintessence. That mystic energy fuels the protective spell.

At +1 to the basic countermagick difficulty (see above), the protective mage can try to dispel the assailant's Effect. At +2 difficulty, he can try to reflect that assault back upon the caster. As usual, each success cancels out one of the attacker's successes. If the protector tries to reflect the attack and send it back where it came from, each success scored over the caster's original roll works as a level of success upon the caster. (Four successes scored against a two-success attack, for example, would inflict two successes' worth of damage or effect of the spell upon the attacker.)

Anti-Magick (Optional)

A common tactic among Technocrats, the anti-magick technique uses Prime Sphere principles (or Primal Utility) in order to harden Reality against an offending Deviant's magick. Mystic mages use this approach as well, but not with quite the same enthusiasm as their technomancer peers.

Rules-wise, this counts as a full-turn action. The player rolls her Prime Rank as a dice pool; Prime 3, for example, would give you three dice to roll. The difficulty is 8 for that roll, and each success adds +1 to the difficulty of a mage who's trying to cast an Effect. Every success costs one point of Quintessence from the Quintessence Trait of the mage deploying anti-magick. Essentially, she's using her own Prime energies to counter another mage's Arts.

Unweaving (Optional)

By using the most sophisticated form of countermagick, a mage can unweave another mage's existing Effects. Curses, gateways, wards, trigger-spells, transformations, and so on can be untangled by a sufficiently successful unweaving endeavor.

Story-wise, the unweaver draws upon his understanding of the Spheres, Prime energy, and the methods of enchantment, then begins a ritual that unravels the original caster's work. Game-wise, the character needs at least one dot in Prime, plus at least one dot in *each* of the Spheres used in the original spell. Rolling at +1 to the basic countermagick difficulty (again, see above), the player tries to overcome each of the original caster's successes.

How Many Successes Does It Take?

If the Effect has been in place for a while – like for a ward, a gateway, a curse-in-progress, or a living construct that has been

Night-Folk Counterspelling

Vampires, werewolves, faerie beings, and other paranormal entities have a chance to resist a mage's Arts... and the mages can often resist Night-Folks' abilities too. Although such monsters don't use countermagick in the way that mages do, their innate abilities give them a certain degree of protection.

Dice Pools

Night-Folk can use the equivalent of basic countermagick. Instead of Arete, such entities use their Wits + Occult as a dice pool. However, *that dice pool cannot exceed* the Gnosis or Rage (whichever is higher, for werecreatures), Willpower (vampires, spirits, wraiths, demons, hunters, and hedge wizards), Glamour (changelings and other fae), Mystic Shield (Bygones), or True Faith (faithful humans) Trait of the Night-Folk character. Essentially, those Traits reflect the metaphysical capacity of the target character. If a werewolf, for instance, has a Wits + Occult dice pool of six but a Gnosis of 4 and a Rage of 3, then she cannot use more than four dice as countermagick.

If the targeted creature does not have a Wits + Occult dice pool, then the Storyteller may rule that the character *cannot* resist True Magick – see ***Optional Limits***, below. That said, a mage needs certain Spheres in order to harm a member of the Night-Folk. As shown on the ***Common Magickal Effects chart*** **(p. 508)**, Life Sphere magick alone cannot affect vampires, werebeasts, ghosts, spirits, or the fae.

Difficulties and Limits

Whatever dice pool you employ, the difficulty for such rolls is either 6 or the mage's Arete, whichever is higher. This way, a powerful werewolf or vampire can shrug off the Arts of an amateur mage, but a powerful wizard or Technocrat can wipe the floor with supernatural foes.

On a related note, the Night-Folk cannot counter immediate-damage attacks like plasma bolts or Enlightened martial arts, nor can they oppose indirect assaults like weakened floors, fire, typhoons, and so forth. The only way to counter a mage's attack is to recognize it as a mystic assault. Thaumaturgical counterspells won't prevent a Virtual Adept from using Enlightened hypertech to hack the vampire prince's bank account.

Mages Countering the Night-Folk

When countering the effects of some paranormal critters' Disciplines, Gifts, Glamour, and so forth, a mage uses her Arete as the dice pool. The Storyteller may rule that the mage needs certain Spheres in order to counter certain abilities – Mind, perhaps, to counter vampiric Dominate; Spirit to counter werewolf Gifts; Entropy and Spirit to counter a wraith's Arcanoi; Mind and Prime to counter the dreamlike powers of the fae, and so on. After all, it's not as though mages corner the market on supernatural abilities... and although they certainly appear to be the masters of paranormal arts, mages have a hard time seeing beyond their own perspectives on reality.

Optional Limits

As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller may decide that a Night-Folk or mortal character cannot use countermagick at all unless he's got some sort of magical knowledge. A vampire, for instance, may need the Thaumaturgy Discipline (or some other discipline that reflects mystic study and understanding) in order to resist a mage's Arts. A hedge sorcerer could counter spells by default, but most other humans could not. Werecreatures, spirits, Bygones, and the fae are magic(k)al by their essential nature, but they might still need at least one dot in Occult or Rituals in order to understand the mage's spells enough to counter them.

Given the vulnerability that fae creatures have to the banality of Technocratic accomplishments, it's fair to rule that changelings cannot counterspell technomagick at all... or, if they *can*, to raise the difficulty of doing so to 9 or even 10.

For more details about the ***Night-Folk***, see the section of that name in see the **Mage 20 sourcebook Gods, Monsters, and Familiar Strangers**.

put together through magick – unweaving demands at least 10 successes, possibly 20 or more in the case of major creations or Great Works. Certain Effects – Gilgul, instant damage, sensory magicks, and the titanic magicks used to craft Horizon Realms – cannot be unwoven. Others might have precautions woven into them, like the Primium armor used in many Technocratic cyborgs and bio-constructs. In this case, the protection acts as countermagick to the unweaving, subtracting successes from the mage who's trying to unweave the original creation. The moral: it's damn near impossible to unweave a HIT Mark. Still, a gateway can be closed, a summoning circle destroyed, or an enchantment broken by successful unweaving.

Quintessence Cost

For many Effects, unweaving doesn't require Quintessence, although you can spend a few points to lower the difficulty of such efforts. If the caster employed Quintessence in the original Effect, however, then the unweaver must spend at least an equal number of Quintessence points to undo that Effect... an important consideration when either wrecking Wonders or removing the special properties of Prime-reinforced weapons, armor, and other creations.

Failure

A failed roll – that is, one that scores fewer successes than it needed in order to activate the Effect – fizzles or fades away.

If you're using the ***Degrees of Success chart***, the spell might wind up having a diminished result; in most cases, though, the magick just won't manifest.

Botching, Magick, and Paradox

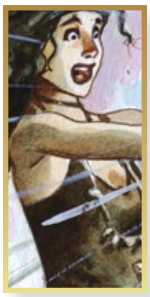
The terror of every mage (and **Mage** player), a botched roll invokes the forces of Paradox. If you roll 1s on your dice without scoring any successes on that roll, then you botch. **(See *Botching and The Rule of One* in Chapter Eight, p. 393.)** Story-wise, this represents a disastrous error: fumbled words, a dropped instrument, dancing widdershins when you meant to dance deosil, and so forth. Game-wise, a botch turns magick into a clusterfuck.

- If the Effect was *coincidental*, your mage gets one Paradox point for every dot in the highest Sphere involved with that Effect. A Correspondence 4/ Life 3 spell, for example, would score four Paradox points.
- If the Effect was *vulgar without Sleeper witnesses*, the mage gets one point of Paradox, plus one point for each dot in the highest Sphere. That spell now garners five points of Paradox.
- If the Effect was *vulgar with Sleeper witnesses*, then your mage gets two points of Paradox, plus two more per dot in the highest Sphere. That unfortunate mage racks up 10 Paradox points and may be in for a visit from the Paradox Faerie.
- If the mage gains five points of Paradox or more within a single event, the Storyteller may decide to roll for a backlash – see the ***Paradox Effect*** section below for details.

As mentioned earlier under the section ***Coincidental vs. Vulgar Magick***, a Sleeper witness must be physically present. Cameras do not count as witnesses in the current reality climate. Mages are not Sleeper witnesses, nor are the Night-Folk or their various servitors. For more details, see the entry ***Witnesses*** in ***Part III***, ***Step Two***.

For obvious reasons, the ***free botch option*** mentioned in **Chapter Eight** does not apply to casting rolls. Given the world-shaking powers that True Magick invokes, the edge of danger remains an essential part of **Mage** – the final element in the trinity of Pride, Power, and Paradox.

Part IV: The Paradox Effect



Magick, it's been said, is a double-bladed instrument. That fine metaphysical scalpel reshapes Reality to a mage's desires, but it cuts the hand that wields it, too. Paradox is the cost of doing business with Reality – the scourge of Awakened vanity that reminds each mage of his true place in Creation.

Poetry aside, Paradox limits a mage's ability to work her Will without consequences. Story-wise, it smacks a proud magus off her throne in various unpleasant ways: burns, prisons, manifestations, entities, and worse. Game-wise, Paradox forces each player to be subtle and imaginative. Vulgar magick is a sure road to the Paradox Effect, and although coincidence can earn a backlash too, your mage is better off playing things safe… or as safe as things can *get* in this World of Darkness, anyway.

Chapter Two presents the metaphysical explanations for Paradox **(see pp. 56-57)**, and **Chapter Six** lays out the game-system effects that Paradox has on your character **(see pp. 331-333)**. In this section, we'll look at what happens when "Jiminy Cricket with a chainsaw" pops up to take a swipe at you, and the various rules that kick in when he does.

Sources of Paradox

Clearly, Paradox is bad juju. In the course of the game, however, it's also inevitable. The question isn't really *WILL I get Paradox?* but *HOW will I get Paradox, and how MUCH Paradox will I get when I do?*

Essentially, a character acquires Paradox points in one of three ways:

Botching Rolls

As we've seen several times throughout this chapter, a mage acquires Paradox when her player botches an Arete roll:

- If that magickal Effect was *coincidental*, the Paradox is minimal: one point for each dot in the highest Sphere used in the Effect.
- If the Effect was *vulgar without witnesses*, the amount of Paradox goes up: one point, plus one more point per dot in the highest Sphere.
- If the Effect was *vulgar with witnesses*, the Paradox can be catastrophic: two points, plus two more points for each dot in the highest Sphere.

Vulgar Magick

Beyond that, though, *vulgar magick ALWAYS accumulates Paradox*, even when the roll succeeds:

- Coincidental magick does not acquire Paradox unless you botch a roll.
- Successful vulgar magick earns one point of Paradox. **(See the sidebar for rules about post-Revised-edition Paradox, p. 550.)**

Permanent Paradox

Certain magickal or hypertech adjustments to a living Pattern bestow *permanent Paradox* points on the character in question. In this case, note each point of permanent Paradox on the character sheet; unlike normal Paradox, however, it never

comes off. A Paradox backlash takes those points into account but does not dispel them. Each time a character with permanent Paradox endures a backlash, those points count again toward the dice pool involved.

Permanent Paradox generally comes through the ***Enhancement*** Background Trait, described in **Chapter Six**. Severe backlashes bestow such points as well, and certain alterations to a creature's Pattern may do so too. Bygones and constructs often suffer from permanent Paradox points – a flaw that keeps certain Technocracy operatives or Nephandi confined to the Otherworlds. (See the ***HIT Marks*** in **Appendix I** and the ***Gilledians*** described in **Chapter Five**.) Essentially, a being with permanent Paradox is a walking reality crime – a violation of Earthly metaphysics whose own body is hazardous to her health.

In all three cases, Paradox constitutes a threat to the character involved, and a large Paradox pool reflects the potential for a serious backlash.

The Paradox Backlash

Generated by acts of magick, Paradox energies build up inside a mage's Pattern. Eventually, those energies bleed off naturally, manifest in strange ***Paradox Flaws***, or else explode with devastating results.

Essentially, Paradox becomes a metaphysical game of Jenga. Each incident that generates Paradox adds points to the character's ***Quintessence/ Paradox wheel***. **(See Chapter Six, p. 331.)** Those points add up until the Storyteller decides to check for a *Paradox backlash*: a sudden release of Paradox energies. At that point, those energies break out and the character's life becomes hell.

Rolling for Backlash

At dramatically inconvenient moments – generally at times when a player has earned five points of Paradox or more in a single stroke – the Storyteller can say "*Let's roll for a backlash.*" Generally, this comes about when your mage has done something stupid, glorious, or gloriously stupid. The Storyteller picks up one die for every point on the Paradox side of your Quintessence/ Paradox wheel and rolls them against difficulty 6. Each success means that one point of Paradox gets discharged.

On the positive side, this discharge dispels those points of Paradox, assuming that they aren't permanent. (See above.) Paradox points that are *not* discharged remain on the wheel, to be discharged at some later time.

On the negative side, a backlash *hurts*.

Effects of Backlash

How *badly* does it hurt? That depends upon the size of the backlash, the sadistic wit of the Storyteller, the things your mage did to acquire those points of Paradox, and the circumstances your mage happens to be in at the time.

As mentioned above, each success discharges one point of Paradox; for other effects, see the ***Paradox Backlash Roll chart***, presented both here and among the ***Magickal Reference Charts*** near the front of this chapter.

Paradox Backlash Roll

Successes	Effects of Discharge
Botch	All Paradox points discharge harmlessly.
No successes	No effects, but no Paradox points discharge.
1-5	One point of Paradox discharged per success. Mage also suffers one level of *bashing* damage per success and acquires a trivial ***Paradox Flaw.***
6-10	One point of Paradox discharged per success. Mage also suffers a Burn of one level of bashing damage per success or acquires a minor Paradox Flaw.
11-15	Usual Paradox point-discharge, as well as a Burn of *lethal* damage or *one* of the following effects: a significant Paradox Flaw, a ***Paradox Spirit*** visitation, or a mild ***Quiet***.
16-20	Usual Paradox point-discharge, as well as a Burn of lethal damage and one point of ***permanent Paradox*** or *two* of the following effects: a severe Paradox Flaw, a Paradox Spirit visitation, a moderate Quiet, or banishment to a ***Paradox Realm***.
21+	Usual Paradox discharge plus a Burn of *aggravated* damage (one health level for every two successes) *and* one of the following effects: two points of permanent Paradox, one drastic Paradox Flaw, a Paradox Spirit visitation, a severe Quiet, or banishment to a Paradox Realm.

Storyteller rolls one die for each point of Paradox in character's current Paradox pool, against difficulty 6.

Staving Off Disaster

Generally, a mage can feel a Paradox backlash coming. The built-up energies within her frame tingle beneath her skin, vibrate in her bones, or beat inside her head like an impending migraine headache. When a backlash threatens to cut loose (in game terms, when the Storyteller rolls the dice), that character can "*will it not to happen... YET.*" The player spends a point of Willpower, and the backlash hovers until the end of that scene.

From that point onward, the mage is on borrowed time. Every additional point of Paradox she gathers adds one die to the coming backlash. The Storyteller could invent some especially poetic horror for the coming punishment, but the mage has an opportunity to put her affairs in order (possibly forever...) as the cataclysmic energies continue to build... and *build*... and *BUILD* inside her...

A player who decides to put off the backlash will discharge all of her Paradox points, except permanent ones, at the end of that scene. (The permanent ones still count, however, toward the backlash dice pool.) The eventual results of willing the Paradox not to happen might be messy, but that scene – while it lasts – can certainly be dramatic.

Nullifying Paradox

A rare but precious ability available only to Masters of Prime allows a mage to wipe out Paradox with the energies of Creation. Story-wise, the magus invests some personal Quintessence (possibly adding a bit more energy from external sources too) into a symbol or Periapt keyed to a magickal working or consecrated to his body and personal Resonance. (See the ***Prime Sphere entry*** for details about consecration.) When Paradox energies gather around him, he releases that stored up Quintessence, and the Prime Force cancels out the Paradox Energies.

Game-wise, the player pools his Quintessence, then uses a Prime 5 Effect to channel that Quintessence and nullify the Paradox on a one-point-for-each-point basis. Any remaining Paradox energies have their usual effect or remain on the mage's Paradox Wheel until some later event. If the Quintessence dispels all the Paradox, then that Paradox is gone until the mage gains some more... as we all know he will.

Shedding Paradox

Under normal circumstances, mages tend to generate small amounts of Paradox and then bleed them off simply as a matter of course. If a character manages to keep her Paradox pool below five points at a given time, then those energies simply fade back into the world at large at a rate of one point per week. Assuming that she doesn't do anything overtly magickal during that time (she might, for instance, activate Rank 1 perceptions but never act on her surroundings in a magickal way), such minor amounts of Paradox cause no difficulties.

If your mage wants to "pull a Willow" and go cold turkey on the magick thing, she can withdraw from reality-altering practices entirely. In this case, the Storyteller might – *just MIGHT* – allow her to shed a Paradox pool of up to 10 points at a rate of one Paradox point per month for the first five points, then one point per week after that. This *optional rule* runs outside the official systems for **Mage Revised**, but it can offer a lifeline to a character walking on the edge.

After she hits a Paradox pool of 10 or more, however, all bets are off. One way or another, a backlash is inevitable...

Backlash Forms

When Paradox energies discharge, many strange things can happen. Oddly enough, several of these Paradox manifestations violate the very same Reality Consensus they supposedly protect. After all, when a person suddenly grows horns, explodes, or vanishes into a hole in reality – possibly in the hands of some demonic spirit-creature – those effects seem anything but real to a scientific mindset.

So what's *up* with that, anyway?

Optional Rule: Paradox in Mage Revised

If you're playing by the Reckoning metaplot rules of the **Mage Revised** line, Paradox gets even nastier:

- A successful *vulgar without witnesses* Effect acquires one point of Paradox for each dot in the highest Sphere in that effect. A Time 4 Effect – even performed successfully while alone – would gather four points of Paradox.
- A successful *vulgar with witnesses* Effect generates one point of Paradox per dot in the highest Sphere, plus one additional point.

For obvious reasons, vulgar magick is significantly more dangerous in the **Revised** setting than it had been before that. As an *optional rule*, however, the Storyteller may decide to use this approach to Paradox instead of the one given in the main text.

Constant Bleeding

Under the **Revised** rules, Paradox does not accumulate inside a mage and then bleed off with time unless there are fewer than five points in a mage's Paradox pool. Instead, all Paradox accumulations of five points or more discharge themselves immediately "unless the Storyteller feels really mean." (**Mage Revised**, p. 194). Rather than letting Paradox build up in a mage's Pattern, this system has the Storyteller rolling for backlashes whenever a mage uses vulgar magick and/ or botches an Effect.

In practice, this rule turns most mages into reality-warping 'Dox machines, constantly manifesting weird Flaws and perilous injuries. Although this idea reinforces the tone of desperation within the Reckoning metaplot, it also keeps the average mage in a perpetual state of misery.

For the effects of backlashes under either set of rules, see the ***Paradox Backlash Roll chart***.

The Paradox of Paradox?

The nature of Paradox itself often seems like a paradox: to enforce Reality, unreal things occur. For that reason, a Storyteller may decide to limit the effects of a Paradox backlash to realistic things like terrible luck or physical backlash. ("*Happens all the time. People just explode.*")

Other interpretations of Paradox claim that the manifestations of a backlash reflect the fears or personality of the mage on the receiving end of the backlash or represent some terribly ironic parody of the things that mage did to earn the backlash. Under this idea, a backlash becomes a karmic sledgehammer, crossing the eye for an eye of Old Testament justice with the self-inflicted element of Threefold Return. ("*That which you do, for good or ill, returns to you threefold.*")

The repercussions of Paradox seem even more uncanny when you take into account the Scourge of **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**: an apparently divine affliction that could either help or harm a mage through a capricious sense of justice. If the Paradox Effect began this way, a person could argue, then doesn't that mean that it is, by default, coming through some sort of conscious, godlike agency? The truth, ultimately, should remain the Storyteller's secret. The more mysterious and enigmatic such forces seem to be, the more ominous and terrible Paradox becomes in your chronicle.

The more notorious effects of a Paradox backlash can be found below.

An Onset of Quiet

At times, a 'Dox-ridden mage can slip into the fearsome form of metaphysical delusion known as ***Quiet***, described in the section of that name, below. Instead of rolling for immediate punishment, the Storyteller just starts slipping notes to the player like, "*You overhear such-and-such...*" or otherwise narrating events that only the afflicted character can perceive. This way, the Quiet slides into the story in a subtle fashion, without the pyrotechnics of other forms of backlash. That subtle drift into insanity suits the name given to such delusions.

An onset of Quiet generally strikes mages who've accumulated 10 points of Paradox or more. Again, for details, see the section on ***Quiet***, below.

Paradox Flaws

Manifestations of the "you are what you do" principle, Paradox Flaws twist reality around a reality-twisting mage. In game terms, a Paradox Flaw makes your mage's life more difficult.

Trivial or minor Flaws create small disturbances, whereas the higher degrees of Flaw spawn absurd distortions of reality.

Strange as they might be, Paradox Flaws echo the effects of the magick that spawned them: a swaggering fire-wizard finds himself leaving sooty footprints or scorching everything he touches; a time-skewing trickster makes clocks run backwards, scrambles the temporal perceptions of her companions, and could even age in reverse; the mind-shattering Agent of Authority could make people tremble with his mere presence – a useful but ultimately alienating Flaw; and the witch who curses or heals too freely might impose the opposite effect – blessing her enemies and injuring her friends – despite her best intentions. Paradox displays a fine sense of irony of the non-Morissette variety, and we encourage the Storyteller to hone a sense of delicious irony as well.

Paradox Flaws increase in severity, from minor inconveniences to gross distortions of body and surroundings. At the higher levels, a mage cannot appear among the Masses without being recognized as some sort of aberration. If the Avatar Storm has faded in your

chronicle (or if it never happened at all), people with such Paradox Flaws probably retreat beyond the Gauntlet for their own safety. If such passage remains barred, then badly 'Doxed mages remain in near-solitude, their lives warped by the energies within them.

Most Paradox Flaws fade in time. Even the supposedly permanent ones ease with the passing of months or years... assuming that the mage does not, in the meantime, acquire more Paradox. Once a given Flaw has latched itself onto a mage's Pattern, however, it tends to become the focus of her Paradox. Subsequent Paradox energies gravitate toward that Flaw and, rather than spawning new ones, enhance the present Flaw. Horns become larger and more prominent; warm or cold skin becomes too hot or cold to touch; fluctuations of time or space distort the localized reality so badly that the mage travels within a personal vortex of oddity. Game-wise, the initial Flaw would move further up the severity scale, keeping its initial form but becoming even more impairing or grotesque.

This severity scale runs as follows:

- **Trivial Flaws (1-5 point backlashes):** Short-lived distortions of body or circumstance haunt the mage for a short time. Hair changes color; skin chills or grows uncomfortably warm; breezes blow or air stills; odd smells – ranging from the pleasant to the nauseating – waft from the mage's general direction. He might hear or speak words in reverse, like an odd metaphysical dyslexia, or witness minor hallucinations among his various senses. (Some Ecstatic mages speculate that psychoactive delusions might be minor Paradox Flaws in action.) Dull or stabbing pains afflict his joints, or sudden surges of weariness or manic energy take hold. Whatever the Flaw might be, its effects last between several minutes to several hours before fading away... unless, of course, the mage continues to garner Paradox, at which point the Flaw may last longer and become more intense.

- **Minor Flaws (6-10 point backlashes):** Although the effects at this level become more noticeable, the Flaw still presents a minor inconvenience – an uncontrollable sneezing fit, perhaps, or an attack of Tourette Syndrome (which is actually an onslaught of sudden fits and sounds, not the stereotypical avalanche of profanity), maybe a blurring of vision or a dampening of sound for an hour or so. Material things around the mage might be affected too: his clothes might wrinkle, change color, or fall apart; his digital technology might all malfunction at once; or his footprints could smoke or leave scorch marks on a carpet. Lower-level Paradox Flaws could become more acute and last longer if the mage has continued to gather Paradox energies. These Flaws might add +1 to the difficulties of certain of his rolls for a scene or two, and they might even become sources of embarrassment.

- **Significant Flaws (11-15 point backlashes):** Now the mage becomes a walking billboard for reality flux: horns sprout from her head, useless wings jut from her shoulders, or her hands curl into claws or gnarled appendages. She might radiate intense cold or heat, or maybe suffer excruciating migraines or incapacitating nausea. The mage could vomit flies, speak gibberish, or float several inches off the ground. Lower-level Flaws last longer and have more debilitating effects. Certain challenges could raise difficulties for certain types of rolls (social, physical, mental) or penalize the mage's dice pools by a die or two. Significant Flaws tend to last a while, too – several days, perhaps even a week or more.

- **Severe Flaws (16-20 point backlashes):** Awful Paradox energies now warp the mage's body and circumstances. His facial features might turn into a smooth, shapeless mass; his arms might transform into tentacles or boneless flaps of skin. He could burn everything he touches or transmute it into some precious or worthless material. (That Midas touch, of course, is rarely as helpful as it might sound...) Perhaps his skin grows stony warts or other projections, or he turns into a shadow or wisp of smoke. Lower-level Flaws intensify, lasting longer and hurting more. By this point, the mage probably suffers reduced dice pools, increased difficulties, or both, and he cannot show himself among the Masses without tragic results.

- **Drastic Flaws (21+ point backlashes):** By this level, the Paradox energies have distorted a mage's Pattern so badly that she may never recover her old, normal self. She might turn into a tree-like wooden horror or melt into a protoplasmic mass. Lovecraft would need to invent new adjectives for the impression she presents. Flaws from the lower ranks can reach inhuman levels and last for months or even years. Plagued by chronic pain, unusable physique, or both, the mage loses dice from various pools and adds +2 or more to many difficulties. Such Otherworldly abominations exist either beyond the Gauntlet or in the most remote corners of Earth they can find.

Physical Backlash, a.k.a. the Burn

A simple yet terrible consequence of Paradox energies, *the Burn* manifests as intense pain at the lower levels, rising to literally explosive levels at the high end of the spectrum. Essentially a searing physical backlash, the Burn manifests as (re)opened wounds, dizzying pains, sudden headaches, brands across the mage's skin (often in cryptic symbols or glyphs), rashes, scabs, welts, and other agonizing and often debilitating afflictions. At the highest end of the backlash scale, the Burn literally incinerates a mage from the inside out or else detonates him in a screaming flash of discharged Paradox.

As shown on the ***Paradox Backlash Roll chart***, the Burn begins as bashing damage at the lower levels, then rises to lethal and finally aggravated damage. A mage can try to soak the bashing damage normally; armor will not help her soak the lethal or aggravated damage, because it comes from *inside*, not outside, that mage's Pattern. Other methods, however, could help in that regard – cybernetics, Life Sphere magick, the ***Cinematic Damage*** option, and so forth. So long as the protection is a part of the mage's actual body, not something that can be put on or taken off, it might help her deal with the Burn.

Why Paradox?

It's a common question: *Why do we need Paradox?* Why can't my mage just sling fireballs down Main Street, like in D&D?

Actually, your character *can* sling fireballs down Main Street. It's just gonna cost him dearly.

Seriously, though, it's because **Mage** *isn't D&D*. If mages could just fling fireballs down the street without consequences, then **Mage**'s setting would look nothing like our world.

For all of its obvious exaggerations and fantasy elements, **Mage** is set in a satirical version of the world we know. And a world where people throw fire from their fingertips on a whim would have developed in radically different ways than our world has. Sure, if your Storyteller wants to run **Mage** in a high-fantasy style, she can disregard Paradox and let mages do whatever they want. Thing is, that world is going to change in some serious ways if things like that start happening... and if they've happened like that all along, the world of **Mage** wouldn't be anything that seems familiar to us. (Although it might look a lot like **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**...)

On a more serious level, magic(k), as it is understood in the real world, outside the realm of high-fantasy media, does not operate without consequences. *D&D* is a war game wrapped up in Tolkien drag. It's fun, but it's nothing like real magic at all. If you look at real-life metaphysical practices, however, you'll see that all of them place major limitations on the things magic can accomplish... and that *all* of them have consequences for using it. Discarding that element would also involve discarding an essential element of authenticity. And although **Mage** is a game set in a fictional cosmos, we strive to keep the essence of its magic authentic, even though the practices and practitioners have been heavily fictionalized.

Beyond all of those factors, you also have several core themes of **Mage**: courage, imagination, hope, struggle, sacrifice, progress, consequences, and interconnectedness. None of those themes would be supported – and most, if not all, of them would be undercut – if magick were a quick and easy thing that every hero could just *DO*. The theme of Paradox enhances the other elements of **Mage**. If that doesn't work for you, then you're probably playing the wrong game.

That said, the larger Burns radiate outward like explosions, inflicting damage upon the mage's surroundings and companions. A physical backlash (of any type) that involves 10 points of Paradox or more becomes an explosion, dealing out damage in a radius around the mage, as per the ***Explosions*** rules in **Chapter Nine**. Such backlashes seem especially common among tech-based mages, whose machines detonate with Paradox energies when things go poorly.

Paradox Spirits

As fearsome as the Burn can be, *Paradox Spirits* – a.k.a. ***Paradox Manifestations*** or ***Entities*** – may be the most horrific backlash effects. Ranging from near-mindless phenomena to legendary figures, these reality police become judges, juries, and occasional executioners for errant willworkers and their aberrant ways.

These entities rarely manifest for minor violations of the Consensus. A backlash of over 10 points, however, might draw the attention of such a creature. The smaller ones seem to manifest and then disperse on a per-offense basis. Larger backlashes (over 15 points) tend to summon more formidable spirits – self-willed beings whose appearance and behavior have become infamous enough to echo through Awakened myths: *Farandwee. Wrinkle. The Man.* Known long ago as *Scourgelings*, such entities are immune to Spirit Sphere magicks lower than Rank 5, unless those magicks inflict damage... and even then, the nastier Paradox Manifestations have an uncanny talent for shrugging off such attacks...

Appendix I features several Paradox Spirits and offers inspiration for more original creations. Because such spirits are sometimes thought to manifest a mage's conscious or subconscious, an inventive Storyteller can create her own Paradox Spirits, based upon the characters in her game. Regardless of their origins, such entities tend to have individual calling cards: certain types of magick that draw their attention, certain punishments they inflict, and certain behaviors they follow when they appear. Some dish out nasty, Flaw-like impediments, others attack the offending mage in combat, and many pull the offender into a Paradox Realm tailored to suit that Spirit's personality. In the old days (that is, in **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**), such beings were even known to aid a mage in need. The modern variety, however, seem as ruthless and unforgiving as the forces of nature that spawn them.

Realms

Like any other kind of tapestry, the Tapestry of Earthly Creation occasionally tears. When it does, those rips in Reality become *Paradox Realms*: pocket worlds where the normal laws of Earth and the Otherworlds no longer apply.

According to some sources, such Realms occupy a parallel existence with Earth's Penumbra, vibrating at a different metaphysical frequency. Other sources plant Paradox Realms far beyond the Horizon, floating like weird little soap bubbles through Etherspace. As with so many other manifestations of Paradox, a Storyteller should decide the truth for himself, then keep it secret from the players. In story terms, Paradox Realms present an eternal mystery that still intrudes with disturbing frequency into the adventures of a mage.

Game-wise, a Paradox Realm could be a solitary hole in existence, a prison managed by a Paradox Spirit, or a Realm that's expansive enough to accommodate dozens or even hundreds of characters. The shape and form of each given Realm are unique and often echo the principles of a particular Sphere. Even this tendency, though, is not a hard-and-fast rule. If you want to craft a Paradox Realm in which the mage meets, or becomes, every person she has ever harmed, then let that Realm become her prison.

That said, each Realm should also have an escape; if one of your players, after all, gets his mage dropped into an inescapable Paradox Realm, that character would wind up scrapped unless you and the player wanted to stage an entire solo chronicle within the Realm. Escaping a Realm, then, should be *possible*, but not *easy*... and that escape should be measured not by mystic might but by solving problems without the use of magick.

Reality Among the Realms

A trip to a Paradox Realm can become an Otherworldly adventure in which the usual rules of reality become puzzles fit for a wizard or philosopher. **Chapter Nine**'s section about ***Magick in the Otherworlds*** contains suggestions for the odd, reality-warping effects a Paradox Realm might have on the usual rules. **(See pp. 483-485.)** As general guidelines, however, a Storyteller might decide to use the following tendencies for the set of reality within a particular type of Paradox Realm:

- *Correspondence*-based Realms tend to skew perspective and distance. It's almost impossible to judge spatial relationships in such places; an object that seems far away might be close enough to stub your toe against, but a person who appears to be within reach actually stands a fair distance away.
- *Entropy* Realms either accelerate decay to horrific extremes, or hold the pristine quality of CGI illusions. Folks tend to associate Entropy with death, but a Realm based on such principles might instead seem incredibly random or painfully predestined.
- *Forces* Realms throw around the elemental energies associated with this Sphere. Storms abound; shadows and light move in capricious ways; Earthly physics run in reverse – water flows uphill or objects fall *up* unless otherwise restrained. Forces-based magick either causes great upheavals or has exactly the opposite of its intended effect.
- *Life*-based Paradox Realms feature biological fluctuations or endless levels of mutation and genesis. Living things might self-generate in midair, out of nothing, or dissolve into new and shocking forms. The mage himself could be turned into a chaotic biomass, growing limbs, shifting in size and shape, or otherwise being rendered helpless in the endless flow of life.
- *Matter* Realms jumble the apparent solidity of material forms into endless fluctuations or unpredictable altered states. Solids become liquids; liquids condense into solids; both become vapors. Colors and mass become irrelevant or else attain such stability that no force imaginable can change them.
- *Mind* Paradoxes trap a mage in her own mind, alone with her worst fears, memories, confusions, and neuroses. The Realm becomes a form of ***Seeking*** **(as described in Chapter Seven, pp. 367-369)**, based not around the advance of magick but rather upon the *avoidance* of it.
- *Prime*-based Paradox Realms pulse with the essence of pure, unfiltered energy. Ultimately indescribable in words, such regions become endurance tests of overwhelming sensations and vitality.
- *Spirit* Realms are, essentially, miniscule Dream Realms into which the mage is cast and then sealed away.
- *Time* Paradoxes confront the visitor with temporal loops, recursive events, dilated time flows, split-screen realities, and *Groundhog Day*-type scenarios in which the mage must either reenact previous sins or deal with a timeline in which she never existed, amidst otherwise familiar locations and circumstances.

In short, the Storyteller is encouraged to let her creativity off the chain when dealing with a Paradox Realm. That said, she's also advised to construct such Realms in advance, then drop them into a story at an appropriate time, rather than try to make them up off the top of her head. A Paradox Realm works best when it suits the overall flavor of the tale and the characters within it.

Unbelief: The Shit Factor

Perhaps the most devastating form of Paradox doesn't strike mages down at all. Instead, it degrades the things they hold sacred: the creations they shape with their Arts, the beasts that embody wonder, the magnificent technologies they strive so hard to perfect. *Unbelief* is the crushing weight of the Consensus, squeezing the life out of miracles and denying the products of a better world.

Although mystic mages feel the effects of Unbelief most keenly, Technocrats suffer from those effects as well. It's Unbelief, after all, that causes bodies to reject cybernetics, restricts flight to the most awkward sorts of contraptions, and forbids the full enjoyment of economic ideals. Certain willworkers refer to Unbelief as "*the Shit Factor*" – the idea that the Masses cannot accept anything unless it's shitty. When Agent Smith in *The Matrix* described the flaw-ridden world created by the machines, he was referring to Unbelief. Normal people, supposedly, cannot accept a reality filled with wonders. It has to be a mess in order for them to accept it as real. And so, dragons and clones and HIT Marks must be disguised or hidden when they appear within Earthly reality. Otherwise, they soon die from the effects of Unbelief.

The Shit Factor seems to work most powerfully in cities... and might, in fact, be the primary reason why the ideal of cities keeps crashing and burning in the realities of urban decay. Rural areas and open wilderness appear to have less weight and more potential for marvelous things. Even so, Unbelief stifles the uncanny marvels of bygone legendry, literally dissolving things that "cannot be" soon after they appear. Perhaps the Mythic Threads sustain certain creatures – vampires, ghosts, and the like – but dragons and aliens quickly disappear without a trace. Ultimately, Unbelief is the damning expression of the mortal status quo: that which should not exist *cannot* exist.

Part V: Quiet

Mages depend upon clear minds in order to do what they do. And yet – in another layer of paradox – they also inhabit a state of metaphysical insanity in which they choose to deny the reality that everyone else accepts. The Awakening is a sort of madness in which a person can no longer see or accept what passes for reality among most other people. And so, a mage occasionally loses track of reality altogether, drifting or plunging into the state often known as *Quiet*.

Essentially a state of disassociation and disconnection, Quiet sets a mage adrift from any reality except her own. At its lower levels, this leads to irrational actions and momentary delusions. At the higher end of the spectrum, this Wizard's Twilight manifests those delusions in forms that other people can see, or else it drops the mage into a prison of her own mind's making. At the extreme end of such disconnection, the mage becomes a Marauder, essentially oblivious to the world outside her head.

As with ***Resonance*** **(see pp. 550-551)**, Quiet often depends upon a mage's actions. A stiff-necked, intolerant character is more likely to gravitate toward *Denial*, whereas a libertine drifts into *Madness* and a hot-tempered killer falls to *Morbidity*. People often view Quiet as a single sort of malady; as the ***Types of Quiet*** section shows, however, metaphysical un-sanity follows the choices made while sane. Like magick, Quiet is an extension of the mage. From the chronicle's standpoint, then, your character will probably get the breakdown she deserves.

Baseline Reality

What *is* crazy by a mage's standards, anyway? After all, when your entire existence is based around denying and remaking the reality that other people take for granted, aren't you crazy by default?

Yes and no... which is why Quiet is so dangerous for the Awakened.

Psychologists and philosophers often refer to *baseline reality* – that is, the level of reality that's generally acceptable to a person or society. The Consensus, for example, presents a massive baseline reality. Around that baseline reality, though, everyone's got a bit of wiggle room: one person may believe in angels, another in the Old Gods, and a third in nothing at all. All three people, however, accept a baseline reality in which objects fall down, the sun rises in the east, and certain temperatures freeze or boil things.

Mages use their beliefs and practices to alter baseline reality. Even then, however, they still maintain their own frame of reference. A Hermetic wizard might invoke angels to cause a typhoon, but he accepts that his friends are his friends, that his sword is a sword, and that there isn't a fat little naked version of himself sitting on his shoulder belching Macc Lads songs in his ear. However, if he *does* start seeing that fat little naked version of himself, or believing that his friends are conspiring against him, or perceiving his rune-encrusted sword as a singing waffle iron, then that wizard is beginning to go crazy. His baseline reality has shifted into the Twilight Zone.

For all that talk about crazy wisdom, a smart mage keeps an eye on his sanity. The power of flexibility carries the price of vigilance. Each practitioner of mystic or Enlightened Arts has a responsibility the world at large: *don't make your practice*, goes one saying, *everybody else's problem*. Such vigilance also explains why so many mages gather into groups – allies can provide sanity checks – and why solitary mages often go batshit insane.

In game and story terms, Quiet occurs when the mage's normal perspective and perceptions about what is and is not real shift toward irrational levels. Even by the standards of his sect and paradigm, that person's baseline reality enters hazardous terrain. As many real-life mystics see it, madness is that place where your perceptions and behavior make you a danger to yourself and everyone around you. Each mage has a different baseline reality... and some of them get pretty eccentric. When eccentricity becomes delusion and potential violence, however, most Awakened folks would agree that that a person's going insane. And for beings with the power to mold Reality, insanity's a truly awful thing...

Storytelling Quiet

Game-wise, an episode of Quiet is best handled as a story arc within the ongoing chronicle:

- The Storyteller makes some plans, based around a particular character's personality and actions, and decides how this particular case of Quiet will manifest.
- Selecting from among the types and symptoms of Quiet described below, he determines the early effects of the Quiet insanity.
- When the character reaches a particular goal (say, 10 Paradox points), or endures a certain challenge to her sanity (reading a blasphemous tome, perhaps), the Storyteller begins slipping notes to the player, describing the delusions or suggesting irrational acts.
- Instead of, or in addition to, the notes, the Storyteller might start introducing weird objects or characters (the hobgoblins) into the story, as if they're perfectly normal parts of the tale.
- If/ when the player resists the idea that her mage is going crazy, the Storyteller can have her start spending Willpower points or making rolls that may or may not succeed in driving the madness away.
- And, of course, if the mage gains more Paradox, the Quiet grows deeper and more irrational... possibly removing the mage from the player's control if that player refuses to go along with the madness or lets it go too far.

Most players enjoy a chance to go crazy and will probably take an episode of Quiet and run with it to delightfully demented

extremes. Just remember: *insanity is not cute or fun*. We can't emphasize that enough. Quiet should be an unnerving and potentially ruinous experience. As a result, we suggest that removing the character from the player's control – either through catatonic withdrawal or total Marauderdom – be a very real option when a mage goes into Quiet. Otherwise, there's no real incentive to fear the madness or escape its influence.

Effects of Quiet

The onset of insanity can be gradual or sudden, depending on the circumstances of the afflicted person. Most often, though, it begins with subtle quirks of perception and behavior, rising (or falling) steadily into a deeper sense of dislocation from the reality shared by everybody else.

In game terms, Quiet follows six levels, starting with the sort of minor quirks that anyone could have, but then progressing... or *re*gressing... toward dangerous irrationality.

Falling Into Quiet

Generally, this metaphysical insanity comes about as a result of accumulated Paradox. The mage becomes so comfortable in her removal from reality that she starts to lose touch with it. Other forces, though, can also inspire such madness:

- **Paradox Backlash:** Strong Paradox backlashes (10 points or more) can knock a mage straight into Quiet. The degree of insanity depends upon the number of Paradox points discharged during the backlash – see the ***Levels of Quiet chart*** for details.
- **Trauma:** Severe mental and psychological shocks can jolt the character's connection to reality. Botched Mind Sphere rolls (on Effects of Rank 3 or higher); extended torture or Social Conditioning; sanity-cracking experiences; devastating loss; massive Mind Sphere attacks (that take the character to Incapacitated or worse); or physical brain damage (five health levels or more to the head) can all provoke an onset of Quiet. In such cases, a successful Willpower roll (psychological attacks) or Stamina roll (physical damage) – made with the mage's current Paradox Pool as the difficulty – might keep the insanity at bay. **(See also *Things Man Was Not Meant to Know* in Chapter Nine p. 407 and *Social Conditioning and Reprogramming* in this chapter pp. 605-607).**
- **Resonance or Synergy (*optional rule*):** Mages connecting with the far reaches of ***Resonance*** or ***Synergy*** can lose track of reality as a result. In this case, the Storyteller might call for an Arete roll, difficulty 8, when the player reaches five dots in a Resonance or Synergy Trait. If the roll succeeds, the mage's excellence overcomes the heady effects of Resonance or Synergy; if not, she succumbs to those forces and enters Quiet. (For details, see ***Resonance and Synergy***, below.)

In all three cases, the level of Quiet depends upon the character's current Paradox Pool. The more paradoxical her

Levels of Quiet

Level	Paradox Discharged	Delusions or Disassociation
1	1-3	Minor quirks or occasional delusions; mage begins to manifest odd behavior and minor disassociation from his baseline reality.
2	4-6	Delusions and disconnection become more severe; mage perceives things that no one else can see, starts denying the experiences of other people, and begins to behave irrationally even by Awakened standards.
3	7-10	Mage's senses backfire, creating blindness (real or conceptual), vivid hallucinations, and erratic – perhaps dangerous – behavior. Hobgoblins might appear, manifesting the mage's delusions in ways that other people can perceive.
4	11-15	Mage either gets trapped in a mindscape of his own design or else behaves so irrationally that he becomes a danger to himself and everyone nearby.
5	16-20	Mage either drops into total catatonia or takes on many of the characteristics of a Marauder but without immunity to Paradox.
6	21+	Mage goes Marauder and becomes a Storyteller character.

Types of Quiet

Level	Denial	Madness	Morbidity
1	Stubbornness, minor projection	Minor hallucinations	Attraction to death and decay
2	Selective perceptions, hypocritical behavior	Frequent delusions, mood swings	Fixation with mortality
3	Irrational behavior, literal blindness to denied subjects	Wild hallucinations, sensory overload	Bloodlust and macabre behavior
4	Deadly fanaticism	Mindscape or constant hobgoblins	Violent sociopathy
5	Fanatical drone	Catatonia or dementia	Sadistic killer
6	Marauder	Marauder	Marauder

relationship with reality becomes, the more severe her case of Quiet will be. See the ***Levels of Quiet chart*** for the practical results of disconnection.

Levels of Quiet

The crazier you get, the crazier you act. In game terms, Quiet ranges from minor afflictions (Level 1) to total dementia (Level 5). At the extreme level of that scale (Level 6), the character goes irrevocably insane and becomes one of the Marauders – a permanent convert to the reality in her head. (See **Chapter Five**, ***Part ?*!: The Mad***.)

For reasons explained in **Chapter Five**, a player character who goes Marauder should be essentially dead to the player, reverting to the Storyteller as a supporting character in the ongoing chronicle. Although a Storyteller *might* choose to allow Marauder player-characters, such characters can easily destroy a game.

Rising Out of Quiet

A character who's aware of her declining mental state can try to shake off the delusions or irrational behavior. In game terms, this means spending a Willpower point, taking at least one turn to do *nothing* except resist the effects of Quiet, and then scoring at least three successes on a Willpower roll. Under the usual **Mage** rules, the difficulty for this roll is 7; as an *optional rule*, the Storyteller might decide to make that difficulty the character's Quiet level + 5, thus making it harder to shake off higher degrees of Quiet. (Shaking off a Quiet level of 3, for example, would be difficulty 8.)

With those three successes, the mage manages to assert her will over the delusions during the current scene. Although the madness isn't gone, she keeps a clear head and gets through the rest of the scene intact. Game-wise, the player removes one point of Paradox from the mage's pool, which might lower the Quiet level.

That roll, however, is an all or nothing affair; the player *must* score three successes, or more, with a single roll – not an extended action. One or two successes just make the delusion seem more real, and failure leaves the mage where she was before. A botch causes the delusion to manifest as a ***hobgoblin*** (see below). Either way, the Willpower point is gone.

Curing Quiet? Some Dramatic Options

With a lot of effort and Willpower, it's possible for a mage to will herself sane. In practical terms, the player spends Willpower points and roleplays out the process of asserting her character's sanity. This can become a dramatic story element, especially if the character's in the middle of some existential

Mindscape Rolls

For details, see **p.** 559

Attempted Task	Dice Pool
Meditate into mindscape	Perception + Meditation
Meditate into Demesne	Perception + Demesne
Reduce time in mindscape	Wits + Enigmas or Perception + Demesne
Communicate to outside	Willpower

Difficulty for all is Quiet Level + 3

or external crisis that forces her to sort her shit out *fast* before ongoing events make things worse.

Other characters can try to help a mage recover from Quiet; doing so, however, typically involves some powerful roleplaying, a few social or Knowledge-based rolls, and an extended roll in which the healing character uses Mind 4/ Prime 4 to drive out the Paradox within the suffering mage's mind. As a base guideline, assume that the healer must invest his own personal Quintessence and replace each point of Paradox in the Quiet-ridden mage's pool with two or three points of the healer's own Quintessence. The particulars of such curing efforts are left to the individual players and Storytellers. Whatever it takes, however, the cure should *NOT* be easy. After all, if fixing Quiet were easy, no mage would fear this madness... and yet, all sensible mages *do*.

Types of Quiet

Although generally considered a side effect of Paradox, Quiet is, in many ways, its own beast – a symptom of dissociation from the Consensus to which any mage, regardless of affiliation, remains vulnerable. It's the flipside of that godlike power to rework reality, the place where no reality exists except the one you perceive. And despite the old stereotypes (and old game systems) that present Quiet as either babbling dementia or catatonic withdrawal, new-millennium mages recognize several different types of insanity:

Denial

Mistakenly known as *Clarity* in **Mage Revised** (there's nothing clear-headed about it), Denial shuts out things the mage does not want to recognize. A common malady among Sleepers as well as the Awakened, this delusion categorically denies things, people, or circumstances that a person refuses to accept. Essentially, you don't believe in it, therefore it cannot possibly exist.

Denial has another awful feature too: a person – mage or otherwise – in a state of denial often acts out the things she denies. The jealous lover cheats on her spouse; the bully-hater bullies people; the religious fanatic murders innocents because they weren't holy enough. "*What you repress*," the saying goes, "*you express*." As a result, a Black Suit who denies the existence of witchcraft might find himself practicing witchcraft as a joke... or worse, doing so without even recognizing the things he's doing as witchcraft ("*That's ridiculous – YOU'RE the one who's crazy...*").

This sort of shadow-projection is less a matter of hypocrisy than of delusion – the insane person literally *does not see* what he's doing. Such delusions are bad enough when Sleepers have them. Backed up by the metaphysical power of a mage, though, they can have fearsome effects on that person's world.

Denial Quiet robs a mage of clear perceptions. She won't see things that *are* there, all the while insisting upon things that are *not*. Often associated with the Technocracy (who don't use magick – oh no, perish the thought!), this form of Quiet can strike any type of mage. A Celestial Chorister could hate people in the name of love; a Weaver could command demons in the name of Allah; an Akashic could become a harmonious monster. When Nephandi tempters cast their webs, they love to inspire Denial-type Quiets... and, because Denial blocks out what the mage doesn't want to see, such weapons become their most effective *shields* as well. ("*Nope, no Nephandi here – not one! Believe me, if there were, I'd know...*")

Effects of Denial

- **Levels 1-2:** At the lower end of the spectrum, Denial manifests as a stubborn refusal to perceive stuff that's obvious to everybody else. *No, there is NOT a dragon sitting in the middle of Main Street; no, Islam is NOT a real religion; no, magick does NOT exist – that's just a bunch of Superstitionist nonsense propagated by Reality Deviants, and the sooner we purge it from the Earth, the happier everyone will be.*

- **Levels 3-4:** As Denial grows stronger, it begins to manifest as literal blindness or deafness to circumstances... or worse, blindness/ deafness to anything but a twisted version of them: *why did you call me a fat pig?; no, you never told me that Master Porthos is dead; I HEARD you planning to kill me and sell my body off for spare parts*. Delusions block out or pervert the reality experienced by everyone around the mage, and things that were once annoying quirks of behavior can become frightening and dangerous.

- **Levels 5-6:** At the highest levels of Quiet, Denial can reshape the world in that mage's immediate vicinity. People might lose their voices in her presence, blurt out things they would never have said under their own power, or even disappear until the mage leaves the room. This explains the weird reality warps that often follow a Marauder attack: blanked hard drives, fuzzy photos or videos, people who *swear* that nothing odd just happened even as the fire trucks arrive at the scene of mass destruction. The mage's delusion becomes part of localized reality, externalizing her refusal to accept certain things into the temporary disappearance of those things from the reality around her.

Madness

The most infamous and common form of Quiet, Madness showers the afflicted mage with mood swings and delusions. Often associated with the Marauders and other clearly

demented willworkers, such hallucinatory perceptions and volatile behaviors start out as little quirks but then swell to sanity-rupturing proportions.

Sometimes known as *Dementia*, Madness turns you into a prisoner of your own mind. Senses feed you incorrect perceptions; things and people who *are not there* appear as solid as you are; surges of emotion or calm drag you along emotional roller coasters, with often inappropriate results (making fart jokes at a funeral, grabbing your teenage son's crotch). And while the dotty old wizard might seem amusing in theory, the maniac who has the power to turn people inside out without even realizing what he's done is a terrifying figure indeed.

Although it can manifest in subtle ways – sounds or scents without a source, strange fluctuations of color or proportion – madness has ultimately *un*subtle consequences. The mage can try to keep things together for a while, and he may even successfully wave off or ignore the early manifestations of delusion. When the hallucinations become too strong, however... or, still worse, start running around as self-willed hobgoblins... that's when the Quiet becomes too powerful to ignore. The mage himself might still *think* he's sane, but his version of sanity looks pretty cracked to everybody else.

Effects of Madness

- **Levels 1-2:** Madness often starts as tiny ripples of unreality or distortion. *Did I just hear the phone ring? Did someone call my name? Who's smoking in here – I thought I was alone?* In many cases, the symptoms begin as extensions of the mage's tools and practice: *great 'shrooms, man... hey, when do they wear OFF? Hmmmm... I thought I had dispelled that ghost...* Beyond that, Madness might set in as sudden mood swings or implacable obsessions, unquenchable urges or hyperfocused monomania. And because such things aren't uncommon among the Awakened, Madness only gets worse from there...

- **Levels 3-4:** By the time Dementia becomes obvious, the mage has already hit a downward slide. Obsessions, aberrant behavior, hair-trigger passions, and vivid hallucinations take hold. Objects, impressions, or images manifest: graffiti, phantom phone calls, floating spiders in the air. At Level 3, only the mage can see them; by Level 4, other folks start to see them too. Meanwhile, the afflicted character behaves erratically, reacting to things from a deluded impression of reality.

- **Levels 5-6:** Madness attains its most frightening degree: wild visions, violent behavior, hazardous fixations, or total catatonia. The mage might suffer from metaphysical autism, withdrawing from her surroundings even while apparently awake. She'll chant nonsense, shit her drawers, and tangle Reality in the strands of her personal insanity. At the highest degree, the mage either detaches herself from baseline reality and falls into a mindscape, or else becomes a raving lunatic with the powers of a god. Either way, she might easily be lost for good.

Morbidity

Drawn from the word *morbus* – "disease" – Morbidity reflects an obsession with death, corruption, and pain. The Archmage Voormas may be the poster child for this particular insanity. From early fixations with mortality and ruin, a Morbid willworker careens toward sadistic pleasures and ultimate extinction. Although referred to as *Jhor* in **Mage Revised**, Morbid Quiet is a soul-sickness... not the Resonance of Death, but a fascination with Oblivion.

One could say that all Nephandi suffer from Morbidity. That accusation gets dropped on Thanatoics, Goths, and Black Suits too. As with all forms of Quiet, though, any mage can grow Morbid in this sense: the priest obsessed with crucifixion, the sadistic lover, the callous scientist. As a form of delusion, Morbidity is less about death than it is about gore, disease, and torment... and whereas some folks glory in vicarious thrills through *fictional* horror, the Morbidity-afflicted mage becomes an instrument of real-life cruelty.

Along with the usual delusions of Quiet – delusions that, in this case, involve decay and suffering – a Morbid mage attains a corpse-like pallor or leprous corruption. His thoughts and activities focus on mortality. Unlike the dark or sardonic humor of the Hollow Ones, his mood is often deadly serious, so to speak – nihilistic in temperament and vicious by design. As insanity digs in further, he'll be driven to unhealthy extremes. By the time he lurches toward suicide or homicide, the Morbid willworker has become an avatar of decay.

Effects of Morbidity

- **Levels 1-2:** Despite the stereotype of Morbid Gothlings, Morbid Quiet often sets in with people who *don't* share a casual relationship with darkness. Most often, in fact, it tends to strike people who deny their dark sides and are paragons of righteousness within their own minds: the pious preacher, the haughty shaman, the valiant hunter of Reality Deviants. Provocative delusions lead to flashes of anger and despair: *Why'd you betray me? You broke my heart. God HATES you!* Violence soon seems not only reasonable but necessary. And with those surges of dark emotion and subtle hallucination, the doors open toward insanity...

- **Levels 3-4:** As Morbidity takes hold, the mage begins to reflect his unhealthy obsessions. His behavior grows callous or deliberately cruel; his thoughts reflect constant violence and hate; he rages, seethes, or settles into cold deliberation. The law of the jungle consumes his thoughts... featuring himself, of course, as the alpha predator. In some cases, he might gravitate with Poe-like fascination toward excess, grit, and horror; in others, he might force himself through a sardonic kind of cheer – the bright-lights grin of an *American Psycho*.

- **Levels 5-6:** By this point, the mage has the look of a wolf, the soul of a virus, and the mind of a demon on PCP. Honestly, this is one fucked-up character, and the Storyteller might want to take it over on general

principle. A mage at this stage of Morbidity is a Pol Pot or Dr. Mengele, but he has inhuman powers and the will to use them in the most sadistic way possible. If he's not already entering the Nephandic Cauls by this point, it's only because he's either nursing a massive case of denial or else feeling like he could be a dark god himself. Marauders of this type are the worst of their kind – reality cyclones that should be killed on sight.

Quiet Manifestations

Mages remake reality to suit their desires... and so, when those mages go insane, their insanity affects Reality as well. Beyond the behavior changes and internal delusions that characterize a Quiet, the following manifestations change the world around a demented mage, reflecting often-subconscious applications of magick.

Hobgoblins

Little minds aren't the only kind of minds that suffer from hobgoblins. That term also refers to the self-willed hallucinations that take shape and direction from the mind of an insane mage. Rooted in the fears, conflicts, and memories of an afflicted willworker, a hobgoblin embodies things that the mage in question would rather deny.

Game-wise, a hobgoblin comes into play when a player either botches a roll to wish away the madness, or reaches a level of Quiet where that character's delusions attain recognizable form. A hobgoblin could actually be anything: a smear of paint, a cry of pain, a religious tract that shows up tucked inside every book on the mage's shelf, the vision of an old enemy or lover, a TV broadcast no one else can see, a song that plays over and over in her head, a stranger shouting on the corner, a car that speeds toward the mage in traffic... The possibilities are limited only by the mage's backstory and the Storyteller's imagination.

A typical hobgoblin lasts for one day for each point in the offending mage's Arete, though some can last much longer than that; if the hobgoblin becomes a character, it has health levels and abilities to match the mage's own Traits. Many hobgoblins manifest as *doppelgangers*: evil twins (or perhaps good ones) whose deeds embarrass the mage in question. Others appear as lost children, crusading reporters, tearful relatives, or other personifications of guilt or irritation. And although the Storyteller could create one manifestation for each point in the mage's Arete, there's really no upper limit to the number of hobgoblins that might appear...

Environmental Alteration

A truly powerful Quiet can spread outward from the mage's mind to alter the landscape and living beings nearby. As noted earlier in this section, things can shift without conscious effort on the mage's part: weather patterns could manifest, the ground might tremble, music might play, and people could be rendered silent. A crowd of people could turn, temporarily, into zombies or birds. Packs of rats, dogs, or naked toddlers might manifest out of thin air to chase the mage down the street. Such alterations come only from mages with great powers and potent madness. When they appear, however, these manifestations can be pretty fucking weird.

In game terms, large-scale alterations are the Storyteller's prerogative. The player has no control over such things whatsoever, and the manifestations can twist reality as much as the Storyteller wants it twisted. Essentially, these alterations become the reality-warping special effects that follow Marauders around, as described in **Chapter Five**, ***Part ?*!: The Mad***. If your mage begins to manifest such Fortean phenomena, then she's halfway to Maraudertown on a greased-tracks bullet train.

Mindscapes

The polar opposite of environmental alternation, a mindscape pulls the mage's consciousness into its own little world and then locks the door behind her. Within that mindscape, the mage struggles through her insanity, finding the keys she needs to unlock the Paradoxes of her consciousness. To the rest of the world, the mage enters the catatonic state that gives Quiet its name. For the mage, that journey becomes a Seeking through which she might make herself sane again.

Voluntary and Involuntary Mindscapes

Depending upon the nature of the Quiet and the efforts of the mage, a mindscape can be either voluntary or involuntary. For a voluntary mindscape, the mage meditates herself into a mental sanctuary where she can sort things out, probably by making a few successful Perception + Meditation rolls. (Difficulty is the Quiet level + 3.) If that character has the ***Demesne*** Background Trait, she might be able to retreat to that mental domain through a Willpower roll of difficulty 9. **(See Chapter Six, p. 311, for details.)** Once in her private space, the mage undergoes a symbolic quest to recapture her equilibrium.

For an *involuntary* mindscape, the mage winds up stuck in a realm of the Storyteller's design, fighting to regain her sanity again. Either way, when she emerges, her entire Paradox pool is clear, unless she's got some permanent Paradox that cannot be resolved.

Time Passing

Generally, Quiet mindscapes last for one day for each point of Paradox in the pool. Mindscapes that involve a Paradox pool larger than 10 points, however, can last one *week* per point, and though a few rolls of Wits + Enigmas or Perception + Demesne (difficulty, again, is the Quiet level + 3) might speed up the journey toward sanity by one day per success, we recommend roleplaying through the struggle as a miniature story.

Messages from Within and Outside Assistance

While inside the mindscape, a mad mage can try to contact the world outside her head. Three successes with a Willpower roll (once again, difficulty is the Quiet level + 3) allow her to send a clear message; fewer successes than that send a garbled message to whomever might be listening.

Meanwhile, an adventurous friend can try to reach into the mindscape and retrieve the lost mage. A few successes with a Mind 3 dreamwalk or Mind 4/ Mind 5 astral projection can send that ally into the Quiet mindscape if the Storyteller

Optional Rule: Resonance and Synergy

The metaphysical reflection of a mage's deeds, Resonance holds a vital yet ambiguous role within **Mage: The Ascension**. Originally defined as story-based, metaphysical echoes, Resonance eventually reflected the mage's deeds through energetic physics of consequence. Because of the different (and often conflicting) treatments of resonance throughout the **Mage** series, **Mage 20** treats Resonance as an *optional rule*. And although the full treatment of that option is too large to include in this chapter or rulebook, a brief treatment of that option appears below.

Certain **Mage** sourcebooks used a very different definition for Resonance. In those sourcebooks, Resonance became a type of energy that links a mage to cosmic principles. Although that definition is essentially the flipside of the same coin, a connection to universal energies would be more properly called *Synergy*. Your **Mage** group can decide to use both Resonance and Synergy to reflect different phenomena: Resonance to echo outward from the mage's actions, Synergy to reflect cosmic principles working inward through the mage. Both energies follow the same rules, but they come from opposing sources with opposing results. Depending upon your group's preferences, you might use only Resonance, only Synergy, both, or neither in your game.

What *is* Resonance?

Essentially, Resonance provides an energetic residue from a mage's effects upon reality; the more dramatic the effects, the more powerful the Resonance. A subtle, temperate mage who moves through life with very little fuss doesn't generate much Resonance, whereas a flashy drama-queen with a penchant for vulgar spells becomes a walking Resonance factory.

Story-wise, Resonance shapes the energy in and around the mage. His personality generates it, his spells reflect it, his aura pulses with it, and his home echoes it. At low levels, such energies are hard to spot, but at higher degrees they become almost impossible to miss. In game terms, Resonance takes a one-word description (the *signature*), measures it between one and five dots (the *degree*), affects the story (the *manifestations*), and follows one of four categories (the *flavors*) that reflect the type of energy involved. This signature flavors that mage's Effects and Quintessence; colors or shapes his aura; influences the sorts of Abilities and Backgrounds he has; and inspires the types of Seekings, Quiets, and Paradox backlashes he endures.

Example Signatures

Alluring	Feral	Nurturing	Stormy
Calming	Furious	Parasitic	Graceful
Decaying	Gloomy	Rigid	Warlike

Degrees of Resonance and Synergy

Level	Degree	Expressions
0	Indistinct	None.
1	Faint	Vague signature.
2	Subtle	Discernable flavor.
3	Noticeable	Odd manifestations.
4	Strong	Obvious echoes.
5	Overwhelming	Unmistakable energies

Manifestations of Resonance and Synergy

X	Indistinct: No discernable signature. No bonuses.
•	Faint: Slight traces (minor ripples, vague feelings).
••	Subtle: Minor but telling characteristics (environmental quirks, energetic taste).
•••	Noticeable: Recognizable signs (environmental oddities, distinct flavor).
••••	Strong: Obvious energies (weird phenomena, potent energies).
•••••	Overwhelming: Recognizable signature (personalized and identifiable phenomena affecting environment, actions, people, and locations).

Optional Rule: Resonance and Synergy (Continued)

Flavors of Resonance

Devotional	Reflection of dedication to a cause, belief, society, or ethic.
Elemental	Reflection of affinity for creatures, spirits, or forces of nature.
Stabilizing	Reflection of calmness, structure, control, and integrity.
Temperamental	Reflections of dominant emotional state.

Flavors of Synergy

Dynamic	Affinity for active, vibrant, chaotic energies.
Entropic	Affinity for destructive, random, disintegrative energies.
Static	Affinity for stable, controlling, preserving energies.

A Storyteller can choose to keep Resonance as a narrative and roleplaying device; that way, there are no rules attached to Resonance – it simply appears as various special effects throughout the chronicle. At higher levels, it could manifest as the ***Echoes Flaw*** **(see Appendix II, pp. 646-647)**, sending weird ripples into the world around the mage. Lower degrees of Resonance have very little effect, but the higher ones can reveal all sorts of things about a given mage.

Alternately, the Storyteller might decide to run Resonance (and perhaps Synergy) as full-fledged Traits, with significant effects on gameplay and characters. In this case, a character begins play with a single dot in a Resonance Trait and earns or loses dots through roleplaying and events during the chronicle. Full rules for this option can be found in **The Book of Secrets**, a storehouse of arcana from **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition**.

chooses to allow it. Once there, however, that friend becomes vulnerable to the mindscape and all its potential terrors.

Characters who suffer damage in a Quiet mindscape take bashing damage; if that damage kills someone, that person might either die for real or fall into a coma at the Storyteller's discretion. As mentioned earlier, the mindscape becomes a Seeking through which the mad willworker – and perhaps her friends – must find a path toward sanity. And like any other Seeking, such journeys should not be guided by dice alone. (See **Chapter Seven** for more advice about Seekings.)

Wisdom From Insanity

There's a reason people speak of crazy wisdom. For although insanity presents a hazard to everyone involved, a person who manages to puzzle through that madness might emerge with deeper insights into life, magick, and the universe.

In story terms, a character who emerges from Quiet with his sanity intact might resolve certain issues; change his Demeanor or even his Nature; gain dots – *by the Storyteller's choice only!* – in certain Traits like Awareness, Cosmology, Enigmas, or Occult; and resolve all the Paradox in his pool, save the ones that have become permanent.

A Quiet, of course, might *never* be truly resolved; Porthos Fitz-Empress faced his own Quiet in the final moments of his life, and such madness blasted Doissetep to its foundations in the Ascension Warrior saga. Marauders lose the people they once were in the dementia they now embrace. And so, Quiet may play a vital role in your saga as a whole... shaping and perhaps transforming the chronicle through a solitary, but *expansive*, madness.

Part VI: Examples in Play

Rules, rules, rules... so many *rules*. What do they play out like when the dice hit the table? The following examples ought to give you some ideas about the practical applications of the previously described systems and the ways in which they mix with narration and roleplaying over the course of your chronicle.

Coincidental Mystic Effect

Hungry Jinx wants to score some food. Panhandling on the Ave, she sets up her sign and decides to hedge her bets with a bit of magick. And so, Jinx takes out her playing cards and begins to deal them out in apparently random patterns while whispering a prayer to her goddess, Risk. As far as anyone else is concerned, Jinx is simply some weird street-kid playing solitaire and talking to herself. Jinx's player Camille, however, knows what Jinx is really up to.

"I'm throwing out an intention," she says, "that someone will either take Jinx to lunch, or else give her enough money to buy a meal or two." As she shuffles and draws the cards, Jinx keeps glancing up at passersby, giving them the puppy-dog-eyes treatment.

"Entropy 2 to manipulate probability," Camille says, "plus Life 2 to note hungry bystanders who'd be likely to help a cute girl get a meal, and Spirit 1 to read auras so she can figure out who's most likely to feed her without expecting anything else in return."

Using Entropy 2/ Life 2/ Spirit 1, Camille rolls two dice for Jinx's Arete. Jinx's battered cards count as a personalized instrument (-1 difficulty), and the Effect is coincidental because she's not doing anything that obviously defies reality or otherwise looks like magick. The roll's difficulty, therefore, is a base of 5 (highest Sphere + 3), -1 for the cards, for a total of 4. Camille rolls the dice and gets one success.

In the story, Jinx spots a college girl not much older than Jinx herself. That girl's got store-bought distressed jeans, a Washington State sweatshirt, and a blue-green aura, suggesting trust and generosity, tinged with a bit of hunger. Jinx's spell tilts the odds in her favor, and the girl looks over to Jinx and smiles. "Hey," she says, holding out a hand. "I'm kinda hungry too. You wanna go catch some lunch? My treat..."

Abilities Enhancing an Effect

Let's say that Jinx's attempt *didn't* succeed. Camille's rolled a couple of times, and folks just keep passing by because Camille hasn't rolled any successes. "Okay," says Camille, "Jinx is seriously turning on the charm."

In the game, Camille rolls Jinx's Charisma of 4, plus her Etiquette of 1, for a total of five dice. In the story, Jinx goes into a spiel along the lines of "*Pick a card, any card, the first one to draw the Jack of Diamonds gets to have lunch with a beautiful girl!*" Because this is a fairly presumptuous stunt, the Storyteller allows Camille to use Jinx's "Dare you!" specialty in order to count any 10s Camille rolls as two successes. The Storyteller sets the difficulty at 7 (a stranger trying to convince folks to buy her food), and Camille scores two successes.

Those successes, in turn, lower Camille's difficulty for the casting roll by -2; with a total difficulty of 3 (4 - 2 = 2, but the minimum difficulty is 3), Jinx scores lunch in no time.

Technomagickal Effect

Dr. Hans von Roth leads cops on a merry chase. Laughing behind the wheel of his reengineered Aston Martin Vanquish (its copper-silver chassis blurred into an eye-watering streak), he shifts into 7th gear, activating the Trans-Temporal Warp Drive...

Meanwhile, at the game table, Paul tallies up the five dice he needs to roll an Effect with Dr. von Roth's most excellent five dots in Arete. Because that Effect – a Correspondence 4/ Time 3/ Forces 2/ Matter 2 Effect – is focused through the hypercharged sports car, the Storyteller rules that Paul's high-speed getaway is coincidental: "*BARELY* coincidental, but I'll allow it this time."

The Spheres involved break down like this: Correspondence to skip the car from one place to another through intervening distances in order to avoid hitting other vehicles, Time to accelerate the car beyond its normal capabilities, Forces to handle the gravitational physics involved, and Matter to keep the car from flying apart under stresses it's not designed to endure. Because Dr. von Roth

has been engineering such capabilities into the car, it functions as a unique, personalized instrument; and because those capabilities work only for Dr. Roth, the car is a focus instrument, not a Wonder.

And so, Paul rolls the dice. The base difficulty is 7 (coincidental = highest Sphere +3), reduced by -2 for the unique, personalized instrument. Paul throws a point of Quintessence into it as well ("*special fuel*"), so the difficulty drops to 4. Paul rolls his five dice and scores three successes...

Seconds later, the cops are left shaking their heads, wondering what kind of car can manage to zip out of sight right before their eyes...

Targeted Damage Effect

Bruce Foster sights, aims, and shoots. A .44 Magnum slug tears into the raging man-beast that's been rampaging through the office complex. The monster sneers – *Bullets? How pathetic* – and then howls in realization that the special Technocratic ammo in Bruce's gun, combined with Bruce's Enlightened marksmanship, has unexpected, deadly consequences.

"Thanks to our special ammo," says Bruce's player, Bill, "I'm using the gun to throw a coincidental Forces/ Prime Effect into that lycanthropic bastard: Forces 2 for velocity and damage, and Prime 2 to energize my bullets so they do aggravated damage." Because this is a coincidental Effect, the difficulty is 5. (2 + 3 = 5) Bill rolls Bruce's Enlightenment of 4 to trigger the desired Effect. Four dice hit the table, scoring two successes.

To see whether or not the gunshot hits, Bill rolls with Bruce's Dexterity + Firearms dice pool. Three successes. Bruce's gun can fire up to three shots per turn; because a player can make only one Arete/ Enlightenment roll per turn, however, the Effect roll applies the damage to as the result of all three shots.

Checking the ***Base Damage and Duration chart***, Bill discovers that his two successes, plus one additional success for the Forces Sphere, equal six health levels' worth of damage. Because the Prime 2 addition enhanced that damage, the arrogant lupine who figured he could shake off that pistol shot suddenly takes a six health-level *aggravated* damage attack. Sure, the werewolf can try to soak that damage, but still – six agg in a single turn? That shit's gonna *hurt*. Suddenly, Wolfie's not quite as spry as he was a moment ago...

Extended Roll Ritual

Nix decides to ward zir home, shielding it from outside observation and setting up silent alerts in case someone breaks in anyway. Gathering up a collection of black candles, a paintbrush, appropriate herbs, a bowl of Nix's own blood, an iron bell, chalk, and other instruments, Nix begins the long process of lighting the candles, burning the herbs, painting the corners with daubs of blood, inscribing chaos-magick glyphs in chalk on various surfaces, and murmuring invocations of safety and threats while going from room to room with the blood, the bell, and a candle.

Nix's player, Koe, hashes out the necessary Spheres: Correspondence 2 to thicken the space against long-distance observation, Matter 2 to bind the Effect to the materials of that place, Mind 2 to disperse a subtle yet steady *Go away* impulse to anyone who comes near, and an additional Correspondence 2/ Mind 2 component that sends Nix a mental alarm if the place gets breached. Because Nix is trying to affect a large area, reduce a would-be intruder's successes, and do so more or less permanently, Koe's Storyteller checks the ***Rite, Ceremony, and Great Work*** section, then decides that Koe needs seven successes – in ritual terms, a *ceremony* – in order to complete the desired Effect.

Thanks to its subtle nature, the warding Effect is coincidental; if those wards were to burst into flame or do something else obvious, the Effect would be vulgar instead. The base difficulty is only 5 (Sphere 2 + 3 for coincidental magick), and Koe spends two Quintessence (in the form of Nix's blood) to lower it to the minimum difficulty of 3. Still, Nix has an Arete of 3, so it'll take a few rolls to complete the ritual.

In the story, Nix goes from room to room, chanting, painting, and ringing the bell. At the gaming table, Koe rolls three dice and gets one success for the first hour; two successes in the second hour; and one more success in the third. Nix has four dots in Stamina, so Koe rolls a fourth time to reflect the fourth hour of work; this time, though, it's a failure – no successes at all. The dice are not on Koe's side this evening. Nix decides to take a break and finish up after a bit of rest.

Following a short break, Nix resumes the ritual. The next roll garners two successes, for a total of six successes. One more success needed. The final hour's work nets two successes, wrapping up the ceremony with eight successes. So now, after six hours and change, the ritual wards Nix's home, deducting eight successes from anyone who tries to spy upon it with Correspondence, broadcasting a fairly strong *KEEP OUT* impulse to would-be trespassers, and sending Nix the desired mental warning across a pretty significant distance. Sure, it took some work, but the wards are essentially permanent until Nix takes them down. The Hollow One settles in to sleep as dawn breaks, confident that the protections will hold...

Divided Successes Option

Over the last several weeks, Malcolm Jamal Leonard has amassed quite a bit of dirt on a collection of public figures. With it, he could demolish their credibility, undermine their influence, alienate their sponsors, and remove them from the larger game of power politics. That dirt, however, must be revealed the right way. Handing it over to the proper authorities would mean nothing. No, his targets must disgrace themselves. *Moyo kizungu* – "speaking the heart." It's an old honesty spell. Combining tech-based data with an ancient ritual, Malcolm prepares a public spectacle of self-inflicted ruin.

Around the table, Steve lays out his plan: "With my new dots in the Correspondence Sphere, I'm going to work up a Mind/ Entropy/ Correspondence spell that'll get the targets to reveal the things they *least* want to be public knowledge." Because the long-distance spell is limited by Malcolm's two dots in Correspondence (rather than to the three dots he has in Mind), the Effect Steve decides upon is a Correspondence 2/ Mind 2/ Entropy 1 enchantment that sends a truth-speaking impulse to Malcolm's targets, getting them to inadvertently spill their guts at the worst possible times.

(In game terms, Correspondence sets up the connections, Mind sends the impulse, and Entropy finds and exploits the psychological weak points of the men and women in question.)

As in the previous example, this Effect calls for an extended ritual, with a large number of successes to be spread out over the targets. Using the ***Magickal Feats*** and ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule charts***, Steve and his Storyteller set the Base Successes at four successes (influencing someone's mind); select six targets (seven more successes, total); establish a Duration of one story for that Effect (three more successes) so that those targets spread their revelations out over a period of time; and then determine – using the ***Correspondence Sphere Ranges chart*** – that it will take five more successes (described location) to reach the targets through the personal information Malcolm has compiled. Thankfully, this is a coincidental Mind Effect; no one will see Malcolm working, and everyone knows that public figures say stupid things when you shove cameras and microphones in their faces. Therefore, Malcolm's ritual requires 18 successes (a Great Work, according to the ***Rite, Ceremony, and Great Work*** entry), with a base difficulty of 5. Tools and time can reduce that difficulty to 3, but it's still a hell of a ritual to pull off.

The process is exhausting; Malcolm needs to take several breaks, and Steve has a lot of die-rolling to do. Thankfully, he doesn't botch any of those rolls, and within a few days the press and Internet are buzzing about the sudden attacks of vocal diarrhea that have taken down several noted pundits and politicians. In his penthouse, Malcolm smiles at a job well done.

Vulgar Magic Effect/ Spending Quintessence and Willpower

No time for subtlety! When Aria finds two assholes beating a guy half to death with a baseball bat, she reaches out to her understanding of the time stream. Taking a few seconds to focus her concentration, Aria blinks rapidly as the baseball bat rises and falls, battering the victim's arms and ribs. Aria takes a deep breath, concentrating on the stench of garbage, the tang of blood, the glass-strewn pavement under her bare feet, the dull thud of wood against muscle, skin, and bone, the miraculous arc of pain and mortality on this chilly city night.

At the gaming table, Cedar picks up six dice to represent Aria's Arete of 6. "Focusing on her affinity for senses, places, and time," Cedar says, "Aria's going to stop those bastards, grab the dude, and get him out of there."

That's a tall order. The Effect would be extremely vulgar – with Sleeper witnesses, no less! Checking the ***Feats of Time Magick chart***, Cedar finds that she would need at least five successes to create a time-bubble around the three men. Because that Effect involves Time 4, the difficulty would be 9 (Time 4 + 5 for a *vulgar with witnesses* Effect. Six dice, five successes, difficulty 9? The odds kinda suck.

"I can't stand by and do *nothing*," Cedar says. "I'm gonna throw three points of Quintessence behind this, too." Given Aria's Avatar of 5, that's easy. This brings the difficulty down, from 9 to 6. Cedar also spends a point of Willpower, giving Aria one automatic success. Now she needs to roll only four successes at difficulty 6. It's still rough odds with only six dice, but it's do-able...

Paradox: Success, Failure, Botching, and Backlash

Cedar rolls the dice for Aria's *vulgar with witnesses* Effect:

- **Success:** The dice fly. Five successes, plus one automatic one from the Willpower! In the story, Aria reaches out her hands and time stops. The men with bats freeze in place, as does their victim. Aria rushes over to him, pulls him up, and drags him out of the way.

  "Are they still frozen?" Cedar asks the Storyteller.

  "You got six successes out of five. So the guys are frozen for..." he checks the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule chart***... "the rest of the scene, because you got one success more than you needed in order to complete the Effect." Watching to make sure that no one else can see her, Aria wrestles the baseball bat out of one attacker's hands, beats the living crap out of both men with it, and hauls the still-frozen victim away.

  That victory, though, has a price. Even though she succeeded, Aria takes one point of Paradox. (Cedar's troupe isn't using the Reckoning metaplot rules. If they *were* playing in the post-Reckoning **Mage** world, then Aria would get *five* points of Paradox: one point + one point for every dot in the highest Sphere used.)

- **Failure:** The dice fly, but Cedar scores only three successes, not four. Temporal energies shift, but nothing happens. One of the attackers looks up and spots Aria behind them. "*HEY!*" he yells, pointing at the mage. The other man turns as well. Some nights, it just doesn't pay to be a Good Samaritan...

- **Botching:** The dice fly. No successes, but two ones. *Botch!* Temporal energies seethe, coil, and then crackle into a burst of sudden paralyzing pain. "Oh, *crap*," says Cedar, as Aria gets 10 points of Paradox (two points + two per dot in the highest Sphere).

  "So, Cedar," the Storyteller asks, "How many points of Paradox did Aria already have?"

  "Um..." Cedar replies, glancing at her character sheet. "Dammit. Six."

  "That makes *sixteen* Paradox?" The Storyteller shakes his head. "This is probably going to be ugly..."

Paradox Backlash

The Storyteller picks up sixteen dice, one for each point in Aria's Paradox pool. Rolling them against difficulty 6, he gets eight successes. Checking the ***Paradox Backlash chart***, he narrates Aria's fate: "The pain locks all your muscles into

place. Aria screams as cascades of time and possibility whip through her body and mind. Over what seems like an eternity, she slowly falls to the pavement, dropping into the black void of unconsciousness. Mark off 10 points of Paradox and eight levels of damage."

"Bashing or lethal?"

"Um..." the Storyteller checks the ***Paradox Backlash Roll chart***... "lethal."

Cedar sighs. "That'll *kill* me."

"Maybe not," says the Storyteller, choosing another option.

"So what happens next?"

"*That*," says the Storyteller, "*is* the question, isn't it?"

From this point on, the Storyteller gets to make the call. Will Aria be blown to bits? Sucked into a Paradox Realm? Visited by Old Man Wrinkle, the guardian of time? Cedar has no idea, which is why it's not often wise to play too freely with titanic forces of space and time. Even when you've got the power to do so, things can still go so terribly *wrong*...

Quiet

It happens even to the best of mages. And when you've been around for centuries, as Jodi Blake has been, then you're no stranger to a little less-than-peaceful Quiet. Blake has spanned the spectrum of Denial, Madness, and Morbidity during her time on Earth. This time, she's in Denial... unaware that she's even a mage, much less a mage from the infamous Nephandi. How did she get *here*, then, and what happens now that she *is?*

In game terms, Jodi's player Jim had been piling up some Paradox. Rather than bringing the hammer down, Jim's Storyteller has decided to spice up the chronicle by giving Jodi a special kind of madness. For a Nephandic Master, *innocence* is dementia. And so, when a bit of vulgar magick sends Jodi's Paradox wheel past the 10-point mark, the Storyteller begins her Quiet campaign.

"Jodi," says the Storyteller, "when you wake up the next morning, you find yourself in a beautiful bedroom, the sun streaming through billowing white curtains. Your pink pajamas feature little smiley faces, and you can smell your mother making French toast downstairs. It's a wonderful day to be alive."

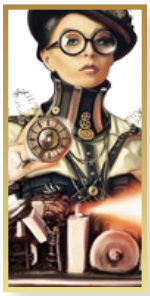
"Um..." says Jim. "*Say WHAT?!?*"

In game terms, Jodi's new 13 points of Paradox have put her in a Level 4 mindscape of Denial. Although the Nephandic sorceress is actually naked in her richly appointed, black and red bedchamber some time after dusk, her newfound Quiet resists her true identity. As far as she herself can tell, Jodi's now a 12-year-old innocent on a bright Saturday morning.

As it turns out, the Storyteller has been planning this out for a while. She has a name and personality picked out for Jodi's mom (in a cruel quirk of memory, it's the 21st-century version of Jodi's real, medieval French mother, now *very* long gone), and a detailed description of Jodi's new life. Meanwhile, Jodi's sorcerous acquaintances gradually realize that Ms. Blake is not herself... that she has, in fact, retreated from the beautiful monster she normally is and slipped into a delusion of being a modern preteen girl who has neither memories nor knowledge about things like magick.

Will Jim shake off the effects of this Quiet by spending Willpower points and making a successful Willpower roll against difficulty 9? For now, Jim seems content to play along with the mindscape and see where it leads. For a mage like Jodi Blake, however, innocence can never last for long...

Part VII: Focus and the Arts



Belief makes the mage. Belief in something – gods, science, spirits, technology, one's own place in the universe, perhaps simply the conviction that one's Will is enough to move the world – is utterly essential if you want to change reality. Faithless folks cannot use True Magick, for such Arts and Sciences depend upon belief. That belief provides the core of *focus*: that lens through which a mage does what he does.

Chapters One, **Two**, and **Six** have already covered the importance of focus and of the three components – *paradigm*, *practice*, and *instruments* – that comprise it. In previous **Mage** editions, that term – and its awkward plural, *foci* – had been used to describe the tools through which a mage works. *Practice* had been called *style*, and paradigm was simply left for the player to determine. Really, though, all three pieces are connected. The tools, after all, are just extensions of the practice, and that practice draws upon belief. Belief *inspires*, practice *directs*, and instruments put that practice into *action*. And so, all three elements provide a focus for your mage's Will.

Practice, Instruments, and Growing Beyond Them

As detailed in **Chapter Six** (see p. 259 and p. 329), each **Mage** character begins play with a focus made up of a paradigm, a practice, and at least seven instruments that channel that belief through that practice. As he or she progresses through the game, your character can choose to alter or discard instruments, change practices, modify one practice to accommodate another one, and perhaps even eventually recognize that she doesn't need the tools at all. Even then, however, your character believes in *something*. Without that conviction, she's just another Sleepwalker, going through motions she doesn't truly understand.

Certain mages never manage to separate the instruments from those convictions. It takes a certain kind of worldview, especially in our era, to realize that you don't need technology

Common Paradigms, Practices, and Instruments

How Focus Works

What does the mage believe? = paradigm

How does the mage turn belief into action? = practice

What does the mage use in that practice? = instruments

All combined = focus

Paradigms (pp. 568–571)

A Mechanistic Cosmos

A World of Gods and Monsters

Bring Back the Golden Age!

Creation's Divine and Alive

Divine Order and Earthly Chaos

Everything is Chaos

Everything is Data

Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake

It's All Good – Have Faith!

Might is Right

One-Way Trip to Oblivion

Tech Holds All Answers

Practices (pp. 573–586)

Alchemy

Art of Desire/ Hypereconomics

Chaos Magick

Craftwork

Crazy Wisdom

Cybernetics

Dominion

Faith

Gutter Magick

High Ritual Magick

Hypertech

Maleficia

Martial Arts

Medicine-Work

Reality Hacking

Shamanism

Voudoun

Weird Science

Witchcraft

Yoga

Instruments (pp. 588–600)

Armor

Artwork

Blessings and curses

Blood and fluids

Bodywork

Bones and remains

Books and periodicals

Brain/ computer interface

Brews and concoctions

Cards and instruments of chance

Celestial alignments

Circles and designs

Computer gear

Crossroads and crossing-days

Cups and vessels

Dances and movement

Devices and machines

Drugs and poisons

Elements

Energy

Eye contact

Fashion

Food and drink

Formulae and math

Gadgets and inventions

Gems and stones

Group rites

Herbs and plants

Household tools

Knots and ropes

Labs and gear

Languages

Management and HR

Mass media

Meditation

Money and wealth

Music

Nanotech

Numbers and numerology

Offerings and sacrifices

Ordeals and exertions

Prayers and invocations

Sacred iconography

Sex and sensuality

Social domination

Symbols

Thought-forms

Toys

Tricks and illusions

True Names

Vehicles

Voice and vocalizations

Wands and staves

Weapons

Writings, inscriptions and runes

to accomplish miracles. When a mage's belief in technology provides the Path to Enlightenment, that belief is almost impossible to shake... and most folks wouldn't want to shake it, even if they could. There's comfort in technology, after all, even if that technology involves books and bones, not computers and cars.

Working Without Focus

Because mages are vessels of Will, they can sometimes will things to happen without using tools or a practice. Working through determination alone, a mage can surpass her focus and conjure Effects without channeling belief through practice or tools.

Working this way doesn't happen without cost. Game-wise, the player spends one Willpower point and suffers a +3 difficulty to his roll. Essentially, that mage throws every ounce of self-conviction he has into the spell, using Will alone to focus his intents.

Because of their reliance upon scientific methods and tools, technomancers cannot perform this trick at all unless and until they completely transcend the need for instruments. A Virtual Adept might believe he's got the will to hack Reality without gear, but until he accepts that concept as an integral part of his reality, he just can't manage it. (See ***Focus, Belief, and the One-Inch Punch*** in the sidebar nearby.)

In all cases, the modifier for using an instrument cannot bring the total difficulty above +3 or below -3. Reality has a certain degree of flexibility, yes, but it cannot be stretched too far.

Working With Unfamiliar Instruments

Every so often, a mage finds herself working outside the paradigm. Maybe she's learning a new practice or adding new tools to the practice she already employs – working with joss sticks and hell-money, for example, if her shamanic Path began in Kenya or Arizona. She might be using someone else's laboratory or workshop, adopting desperate measures (like grabbing a Black Suit's weapon during a firefight), or using instruments and rituals that she hasn't had time to familiarize herself with just yet. ("*The drums don't really speak to me until we've spent some quality time getting attuned to each other's vibrations.*") In such situations, your mage is working with an unfamiliar instrument or practice... which is often better than using nothing at all, but it's not as effective as your established bag of tricks.

In game terms, this unfamiliarity manifests as an increase to your difficulty until you've had some time to adjust to the instruments or rituals in question. At the earlier stages, a totally unfamiliar instrument (like a jetpack ganked from some crazy Etherite) or ritual (like joining a Lakota fancy-dance when you normally focus through the Five Rhythms movement practice) adds +2 to your difficulty. Later, when you've had some experience with the tools or practice in question (you've spent some time on the gun range with that blaster pistol or learned how to call the corners in your new Wiccan community) but have not yet fully adopted that practice, the modifier drops to +1. Both modifiers appear on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart***.

Changing Tools and Practices

Story-wise, a character can modify or alter his practice and its associated tools by going through a major change of life. It's fairly easy to modify your existing practice – to, for example, go from being a primitivist Pagan to adding computers and modifying the Old Ways into a technopagan practice. Radical conversations – say, going from Pagan witchcraft to Sunni Islam – are more difficult, demanding intense roleplaying and deep story arcs.

As described in **Chapter Six** under ***Changing Focus and Allegiance***, (p. 339), such monumental paradigm shifts have various game and story complications. Although a character does not lose Arete, he must return to at least seven instruments (several of which may combine his old practice with his new one). For several in-game months, he'll be working at half of his previous Sphere levels too... after all, he's learning an entirely new way of dealing with those principles, even if he *does* still understand them. **Chapter Six** covers the details about that mage's return to his previous levels of accomplishment; for now, just remember that your character is reorienting his deepest-held beliefs.

Growing Beyond the Tools

When it comes to moving beyond the tools of a given practice, mystic mages have a major advantage over tech-based ones. Despite the occasionally cumbersome nature of cauldrons and rites, a mystic worldview is generally more flexible than a scientific one. The mystic may eventually recognize that magick flows from his Will and a connection to the universe at large; a scientist, however – even a crazy one – still remains convinced that her tools and theories provide the bridge between Will and Effect. **(See the sidebar *SCIENCE!!!* in Chapter Six, p. 290.)** Overcoming that conviction is sometimes possible, but it's difficult to do.

In game terms, a mystic character can begin discarding the instruments of her practice when she reaches Arete 3. From that point onward, she may discard one instrument per point of Arete beyond the third – two at Arete 4, three at Arete 5, and so forth. By Arete 9, she *can* use tools but no longer needs to do so – see ***Arete, Focus, and Instruments*** in **Chapter Six**, (p. 329).

Technomancers, by definition, find it difficult to do that – they do, after all, see "via technology". A mystically oriented technomancer cannot discard instruments until Arete 6. From then on, however, she realizes that her understanding transcends her need for technology, and she can set aside *two* tools per dot in Arete instead of one.

Technocrats receive so much indoctrination that they never break through their preconceptions that way. Unless he leaves the Technocracy to pursue a different Path, a Technocrat remains convinced that his faction's perception of reality is the only one that truly works... and that perspective demands instruments of science, even if those instruments aren't always obvious. At Arete 10, a Technocrat becomes part of the Machine – a focus for the Will of technology instead of the other way around.

Belief: The Core of Focus

Without or without instruments, belief forms the core of a mage's focus. Often referred to as *paradigm*, that belief reflects the way your mage thinks about the world, her place in it, and the things she does in order to spin that world to suit her purposes.

Beliefs and paradigms aren't quite the same thing, but they're closely related to one another, especially with regards to a mage's focus. *Belief* tends to be a personal faith or creed, whereas *paradigm* tends to reflect an intellectual framework for understanding such things. Each depends upon the other.

Focus, Belief, and the One-Inch Punch

Despite some misconceptions suggested by **Mage**'s first edition, a mage doesn't use her focus to fool witnesses while picking Reality's pocket. Focus is an intrinsic element of every mage, and although an individual might eventually recognize that *she herself* is the true focus of her Arts, few mages ever reach the level where they can depend upon nothing except themselves.

Ultimately, of course, the mage *is* the true focus – the living instrument of practice and belief. That's an easy concept to think about, but it's almost impossible to grasp on a soul-deep level. True, a mage might *intellectually* realize that she's just moving things around in order to direct her intentions toward a desired purpose. Understanding that on a level that allows her to rearrange reality on a whim, however, is like breaking a board with a one-inch punch. Sure, you might recognize that it's possible; you could watch Bruce Lee do it on YouTube, and maybe even train well enough in martial arts that you can smash planks with a powerful punch or kick. Mastering the one-inch punch, however, takes dedicated practice with lesser applications of those arts. Few martial artists can break thick wooden boards with that punch, and even Bruce Lee himself had to punch the board.

Now try breaking that board simply by thinking about doing so.

Right. *That's* why it's so hard to grow beyond a focus even when you understand that it's theoretically possible to do so.

It can be said fairly that paradigm represents *how you think the world works*, and belief represents *why you think it works that way*.

The varieties of human belief are almost limitless. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that every living person (and possibly every thinking entity) holds different beliefs. The things we believe come from so many factors – culture, experiences, memories, perceptions, meditations upon those other factors, and far more besides – that although we can make general statements about a belief, we can never truly know what another person believes, nor can anyone else truly share our unique paradigm. We can come close in many respects, but except in the rare cases where a mage shares a lasting, total mind-body-soul connection to another entity, our beliefs still occupy different worlds.

Common Mage Paradigms

The P-word catches lots of flack in **Mage**. Really, though, paradigm is a pretty simple idea. A paradigm is a model that reflects the way something works. **Mage** paradigms represent the various belief systems that Awakened and unAwakened people use to understand the world they share.

The most common belief systems you'll find in **Mage: The Ascension** include:

A Mechanistic Cosmos

Creation is essentially a machine. By understanding it, we can elevate ourselves to a superior state. All things possess an intrinsic sense of order, and chaos is an illusion that conceals a deeper form of symmetry. Although it's most obviously identified with the Technocracy, this paradigm goes back at least as far as Classical Greece. The "divine watchmaker" concept from Enlightenment Deism, certain forms of Gnosticism, and the postmodern concept of reality hacking all stem from this image of a systematic and comprehensible cosmos.

To the mechanistic viewpoint, enlightenment includes a clear-eyed view of the cosmic machine. Through it might be perceived through lenses of godhead, those divinities are still part of the system. Magick, therefore, is an Enlightened Science through which a person tweaks the gears. Metaphysical practices are simply toolkits for the people who know how to tinker with reality.

A World of Gods and Monsters

In this view, Creation is fundamentally irrational, dangerous, and filled with powerful forces, most of which are hostile. Nothing makes sense for very long, and apparent safety can give way at any moment and plunge us into chaos. Magick, science, and faith are tools we use, like fire and steel, to keep the threats at bay; those tools give us a leg up on our ancestors, but in the end we're all utterly fucked. Under this view, magick is a cosmic weapon, and using it makes you a monster too. Those gods and monsters hold the keys to magick, and if they like you (or if you kick their ass), they might share those powers with you... so long as your sanity holds out.

The dark side of existential philosophy, this model insists that everything is meaningless. Paradoxically, it's both a very primitive viewpoint and a completely modern one. In the World of Darkness, it's literally true – there really *are* vampires and evil spirits all over the place. Human beings *are* prey for beings that are essentially gods, and mages frequently become those godly monsters themselves. Although it often comes across as the mordant creed of Hollow Ones and other orphans, this model finds its way into the supposedly refined beliefs of many Tradition, Technocracy, and Disparate mages... and, of course, into the delusions of Marauders and the malicious truths of the Nephandi, for whom its reality becomes one of their greatest philosophical weapons. After all, when the werewolf's at your door, the world seems pretty fucking irrational – and very *obviously* monstrous.

Bring Back the Golden Age!

Once upon a time, goes this paradigm, everything was perfect. God or the Gods reigned in glory, and people held a valued, though submissive, place in this Earthly paradise.

And then something broke it. Maybe that catastrophe involved disobedient human beings, rebellious gods or angels,

an invasion of savage horse nomads, or some other upheaval that signaled an end to the Golden Age and the beginning of an era of misery. It's an archetypal story that echoes from monotheistic scriptures to neopagan lore. *We had a good thing once*, it goes, *and we lost it – so it's up to us to win it back!*

Magick or Enlightenment, in this system, comes from your connection to that Golden Age, its ideals, its ancient wisdom, and the power it once had and will have again. This belief finds its way into the Tradition stories about life before Technocratic rule... and also into the ideals of New Avalon, which are held by certain Technocrats. It provides the foundation for the Akashic Arts, which recall a lost sense of human perfection. In a warped sort of way, it even shapes a Nephandic point of view, wherein Primal Chaos was usurped by Light and so everything must be returned to the Dark before the proper order is restored.

Creation is Innately Divine and Alive

The world, perhaps even the *universe*, is a living entity. That entity is either part of Divinity or else is Divinity itself. Gods and monsters exist, as do pain, horror, and death; that's cool, though, because in the end good things come from all the suffering. Death sustains life, life gives way to death, and the whole thing is a cycle that perpetrates itself in an ultimately beneficial way. Magick flows from an understanding of that cycle and your place in it as an agent of change. Everything, perhaps, has the potential of magick, but most beings never realize it.

Best recognized as a common perspective among Verbena, Dreamspeakers, Euthanatoi, Ecstatics, and other grimly affirmative mages, this model stresses pragmatic acceptance mixed with wild joy. Certain takes on Kabbalism gravitate in this direction too, with Creation as the infinite embodiment of ineffable God. Minus the god part, this paradigm has a scientific analog in the Gaia hypothesis, which insists that Earth is a living, vaguely sentient biomass. Certain Progenitors embrace this idea, especially in the 21st century, when that biomass appears to be fighting its human infection. Unlike the *Gods and Monsters* paradigm, this belief system essentially says that there *is* a point to the madness if you look at the Big Picture and accept that what we perceive as pain and horror are merely ripples across a larger spectrum of life.

Divine Order and Earthly Chaos

According to the most prevalent belief system on earth these days, the material world is an imperfect reflection or creation of sublime Celestial Order. This paradigm covers the world's three dominant religious creeds (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) as well as many strains of Confucianism, Hinduism, and other philosophies. Some believers see a cosmic Adversary opposing the Divine Order's God or Gods, and others consider our miserable slab of mortal muck to be a corruption of godly Will or abstract Platonic ideals. **(See *Gnosticism* in Chapter One, p. 39.)**

Magick, in this perspective, comes from observance of and obedience to heavenly perfection, or else from the forces

of adversity that oppose the Will of Heaven. Some believers, who may view the gods as archetypes that represent that Order, view this heavenly plan as the interplay of impersonal cosmic forces that are perfect in their own right; most, however, see Earth and its surrounding Realms as a titanic chessboard, with mages playing the role of valuable but ultimately expendable pieces in the game.

The obvious creed of monotheistic mages like the Celestial Chorus and the Ahl-i-Batin, this order and chaos model extends to polytheists (the Wu Lung), agnostic mystics (many Akashayana), and groups that straddle and blur the lines between mono- and poly-theism (the Bata'a, many Dreamspeakers). Even certain professed atheists, most notably among the Technocracy, accept a godless version of this idea, which merges the Order/ Chaos concept with the *Tech Holds All Answers* paradigm below. With or without divinities, the core of the paradigm is that perfection exists, and although Earthly life falls far short of it, such grace remains attainable. Ascension, in this case, involves transcending our vale of tears and joining, if only as a servant, the grand Celestial Order.

Everything is Chaos - You Only Think it Makes Sense

The core of existential philosophy, this paradigm insists that Creation is indifferent and possibly meaningless until and unless we choose to impose meaning on our small part of it. Magick comes from wrangling whatever cosmic mysteries or principles you believe in and realizing that your belief is the thing that gives them power. Ultimately, then, magick comes from within. The Universe is an Etch-a-Sketch, and mages learn how to twiddle the knobs. At its extreme, this view maintains that nothing means anything... and that, perhaps, *everything* exists only in a mage's head. Who's to say this view is wrong? After all, the Universe might simply be a game played out in some mad god's mind...

Everything is Data

It's all code. That's the theory, anyway. What we call reality is actually a simulation, a Matrix, a holographic projection that can be manipulated by anyone who knows the Reality Code. Variations on this idea include the concept of a God code that allows the Enlightened Elite to find cheats; a code interwoven into holy texts like the Bible, Qur'an, or Torah, or in divinatory systems like the I Ching or Tarot; a computerized take on the *Mechanistic Cosmos* paradigm; or the theory that everything is composed of waves and frequencies that can be adjusted with music or other methods. Regardless of the nature of that information, the paradigm remains the same: everything is data, and smart folks can work with that data.

For those who embrace this paradigm, the Digital Web is the ultimate smoking gun. Composed of living (or at least *adjustable*) data, the Web embodies this belief. The material world, of course, is far more complex, with eons' worth of bugs and twists of code. Even so, a reality hacker knows how to scan that code, rewrite it, and tweak physical, social, and mental realities through a sophisticated understanding of essential data and the methods that command it.

Everything is an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake

A dour yet prevalent view among mages is that Creation as we know it is a big fucking lie. It was created as a prison, a joke, or a project by malignant entities (*Matrix*-style Gnosticism); it's a cosmic accident that only *seems* significant (a common view among Marauders, Virtual Adepts, and many Technocrats); or it's an illusion obscuring a deeper Cosmic Truth that's essentially benevolent or, at worst, indifferent (an idea often affiliated with strains of Buddhism, Hinduism, weird science, and existential philosophy).

In this perspective, magick comes from transcending the illusion and learning how to work the strings that bind up everyone else. Knowledge and understanding provide the ultimate Ascension from this painful shadow of Cosmic Truth. The flipside, of course, involves making pacts with the powers behind the throne. Many Nephandi view their Path this way. The entire world is a grotesque joke, goes their reasoning, so you might as well enjoy some perks along the way.

It's All Good - Have Faith!

This New-Age Gnostic conceit insists that Creation is ultimately benevolent. We suffer because we *believe* we'll suffer; if and when we adjust our attitude, the world spills out its blessings upon us. Magick comes from refusing to be bound by common expectations. Energy is essentially a positive force, and a positive attitude can literally do wonders with it.

Although it's easy to make fun of such a paradigm, such beliefs are remarkably effective in the World of Darkness. There really *does* appear to be a correlation between good fortune and an optimistic viewpoint. Maybe it's simply the defiance involved – spitting in the face of hell, as it were. For whatever reason, this transcendent Pollyanna lends power to Ecstatics, Dreamspeakers, and other mystics (even the occasional technomancer!) who treat Creation more like a party than a funeral.

Might is Right

The Law of the Jungle rules a dog-eat-dog world. As we're hurled through an indifferent cosmos, nothing matters beyond an individual's ability to impose his Will. The truly superior man or woman excels because that person will accept nothing less than excellence. Anyone who cannot meet exacting standards is essentially agreeing to be fodder for the elite.

A ruthlessly popular paradigm, *Might is Right* takes its name and ethos from the book of that name by the pseudonymous author Ragnar Redbeard. Commonly called "social Darwinism," it actually corrupts Darwin's assertion that the most *adaptable* organisms survive. Ayn Rand and Anton LaVay cribbed this philosophy from a simplified version of Nietzsche's übermensch ideal, and their adherents maintain that perspective through business, politics, and popular debate. Under this paradigm, truth is a useful illusion, fabricated and manipulated by society and those who govern or transcend it. "Right" refers less to a *moral* correctness (morality is for weaker beings!) than to the act of seizing your rights through superior might.

For mages, this paradigm heralds the triumph of the Will, rewarding Awakened Ones with a superior state of existence. Ascension, therefore, is an individual goal, with social Ascension being the ability to get lots of people to accept your dominion. Some versions of this paradigm acknowledge implacable gods; others forsake any form of godhood other than personal perfection. Ultimately, *Might is Right* challenges a person to transcend the herd and achieve excellence at the expense of inferior beings. Reality, to this perspective, is just one more bitch to be slapped around when necessary.

One-Way Trip to Oblivion

A distressingly common belief attached to many of the other paradigms is that everything is doomed. Someday, probably soon, the whole house of cards will collapse, God will call us to account, and the heat-death of the universe will wipe away everything we ever valued, accomplished, or believed. For religious people, this End Times scenario means the extinction of this world and the beginning of a new one... preferably one where they're in charge. Among agnostics and atheists, nothing fucking matters because it's all dying anyhow. All that's important is getting *what* you can, *while* you can, and enjoying the show before the lights go off for good.

Every faction has this belief among its ranks. The ticking clock that seems to define the World of Darkness reinforces a pessimistic view. If you embrace the Reckoning metaplot described in **Chapters Three**, **Four**, and **Five**, it's an accurate belief – the End Times really *are* upon us! To these believers, magick involves taking whatever a mage can grab, from whatever source appears to work, and rattling those metaphysical keys in all the doors you can find, hoping to open a few. Time's short, after all, so any tactic becomes fair game.

For obvious reasons, this is the ultimate Nephandic line. It encourages every sort of excess, from religious extremism to Randian selfishness. However, it also inspires the greatest acts of heroism. If Creation's on a ticking clock, after all, then the greatest heroes may be the ones who can stop time, turn back the hands, or change the outcome when everything seems lost.

Tech Holds All Answers

Technology is not a modern secular invention; really, it's the other way around. The sciences we know of in the modern world are descendants of alchemy, sacred geometry, and other forms of refined knowledge with repeatable results. Most elements of modern science were once thought to be keys to God's Creation, given to selected men (and occasionally to women) to enact God's plans on Earth. Atheistic rationalism, therefore, comes out of inquiries made possible by knowledge once thought to come from the gods.

According to the dominant paradigm in the industrialized world, the universe is innately rational and understandable. Every question has an answer, and technology provides the tools by which we can understand them. Magick is simply science that hasn't yet been accepted by the average person and may always be too advanced for most folks to understand. Although this is the default Technocratic worldview, the Technocracy isn't the only faction that embraces it. Most Etherites, Virtual Adepts, Children of Knowledge, and even many Hermetic mages accept this belief. High Ritual Magick, after all, is just another form of technology, even if ritual magicians hate to think of it that way.

These paradigms aren't exclusive, nor are they the only systems of belief among Awakened folks. Most of them cross over into one another, mingling End Times theology with Golden Age ideals and a Divine Order cosmology behind them both. When you decide what a mage believes, *whatever* she believes, you've got a good idea about what her faith, focus, affiliations, and goals will be. And considering how vital belief is in this magickal world, that's a major – if often underrated – element of any **Mage** chronicle.

Creating Other Paradigms

Most belief-philosophies can be modeled off some variation or combination of the entries above. If you want to create a new paradigm, or reflect one that doesn't seem to fit those entries, remember the following points when you're summing up that paradigm:

- **Belief Follows Need:** People create and accept new belief systems because those beliefs suit their needs. If you're a hungry person in a war-torn land, for instance, then you need something that helps you understand your circumstances, either accepting them as temporary ("*Things will be better in heaven*") or improving them ("*I can fight for my right to be free*"). In **Mage**'s history, the Masses didn't accept technology because Men in Black beat them up. Folks accepted tech because it improved their lives.

- **Worthless Beliefs Get Rejected:** By the same token, people toss out ideas that get in the way. When Victorian ideals met the meat grinder of World War I, those ideals gave way to existentialism, nihilism, and postmodernism. A paradigm may work for a while, but if it no longer gets the job done, folks will latch onto an idea that *does*.

- **Magickal Paradigms Demand Strength:** Mages use their paradigms as levers that move the world. A weak lever – say, belief that Mickey Mouse is God – will break under that kind of stress. As a player, then, avoid facile or ridiculous paradigms. Your mage lives and dies by his beliefs, so those beliefs – and the people who accept them – must be strong enough to hold up under pressure. Sure, you can argue the fine points of Pastafarianism and the exact commandments of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, but will they help you survive a civil war? Probably not.

- **Evidence Substantiates Belief:** Strong paradigms need firm foundations. As a result, the people who propagate beliefs submit evidence that backs up those beliefs. That's why religious people testify about faith and miracles, why scientists provide peer review, why philosophers argue their contentions. Paradigms without substance quickly

Mixing Practices

Although every **Mage** character needs at *least* one practice, you're not restricted to *only* one practice. Most 21st-century mages blend two or three traditional practices into a single personal practice. Lee Ann, for example, crosses crazy wisdom with a bit of shamanism and martial arts; Jennifer Rollins melds craftwork with witchcraft, and Jinx mixes gutter magick with a fair amount of chaos. You can blend up to three of the practices below into a single practice, or even invent your own, *so long as the practices in question fit a coherent belief system.* Sure, a blend of shamanism, hypertech, and alchemy is possible... but only if your character believes that such a practice could help him change his world.

Practice and Coincidence

The world's a big place, with lots of cracks in its apparent Consensus. Even so, certain practices tend to be coincidental in the 21st-century World of Darkness, whereas others tend to seem vulgar. For an overview of these practices and the way they come across throughout the world, see ***Reality Zones*, (pp. 611-617)**.

fall apart. Ones *with* substance endure. And although force makes compelling short-term arguments ("*Obey God or die*"), such belief systems crumble when a better one inspires revolution.

If you want to craft paradigms beyond the ones listed above, look into real-world philosophies, creeds, and metaphysics. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Philosophy* or other, similar books can help inform and inspire your ideas. You don't need a master's degree in comparative religions in order to play **Mage**, of course, but if you want new models of belief, you should examine the existing ones first. As always, your Storyteller always has final approval over that new system of belief. If she says, "*No, you can't base your magick practice off of Monty Python quotes*," then her judgment stands. You *might* be able to change her mind using your knowledge of real-world philosophies, but if she says *NO*, respect that and move on.

Moral Absolutes or Relativity?

It's one of the biggest hot-topic debates among mages, **Mage** players, and even **Mage** creators: *are there absolute moral forces in the universe?* Is everything morally relative – that is, do morals and ethics depend on who, where, and when you are? Or are there cosmic moral forces that make certain things *always* right or wrong?

We can't answer that question for you.

Certain mages – especially Choristers, Templars, and other devoutly religious folks – assert absolute moral forces even when their own actions become morally relative. Others aren't so sure about that, or they claim that *everything* – including time, space, and morality – is relative. In the end, the answer to such questions is up to the Storyteller behind each individual chronicle... which, by extension, *does* leave the entire issue relative. Your characters might exist in a dualistic cosmos, a moral void, or a righteous universe in which the Creator will eventually set everything to rights. **Mage** leaves the ultimate answer – if one even exists – up to you.

Practice: The Shape of Focus

Practice means "to make" or "to do." And so, a mage – guided by her beliefs – does her magick through a practice. As the name suggests, a practice is also *practical*, turning abstract ideas into useful activities.

When your character makes things happen, she employs a practice that serves her needs and beliefs. One mage might petition her gods, whereas another dons her business suit, applies subtle cosmetics, and goes off to work her Will at the shareholders' meeting. In game terms, every mage has a practice; in story terms, that practice comes from that character's culture, beliefs, and circumstances.

An appropriate practice can also spell the difference between coincidental magick and vulgar magick. That said, **Mage** characters don't choose their practices based on in-game benefits. In **Mage**, as in real life, people often choose to believe inconvenient things and follow inconvenient practices. Sure, that High Ritual magician knows he's an anachronism in the postmodern world, channeling his Will through cumbersome rituals and theatrical instruments. It'd be quicker and easier for him to simply use a computer like everybody else. For him, though, his practice is a matter of pride. He's not *like* everybody else, so his beliefs, practices, and instruments set him apart, defining him as extraordinary even when they seem somewhat inconvenient.

Below, we've presented a range of common practices within **Mage**'s world. Each entry is *exceedingly* generalized, encompassing dozens – sometimes *hundreds* – of loosely related disciplines, different in many specifics though linked by several common elements and intentions. Each one, though, offers an overview of a practice that you can choose for your character. If you like (and with the Storyteller's okay), you might create your own practice to suit your character. Just remember: every practice meets a need. People craft new arts, sciences, and religions when the old ones don't accomplish the things they needed to accomplish. If and when you come up with something new, ask yourself this: *how does this practice meet my character's needs, beyond the ability to cast Effects? How does it turn his beliefs into actions? And what sorts of instruments aim those actions toward a desirable goal?*

In the spirit of such activities, each of the following entries features a few ***Associated Paradigms***, ***Associated Abilities,*** and ***Common Instruments***. This way, you've got some guidelines for the things your mage knows, does, and uses in order to pursue her practice of choice. Those Abilities can be found in **Chapter Six**, and the instruments are detailed in the section after this one.

Alchemy

From turning base materials into decaying messes and then moving them upward toward eventual perfection, the ancient art of alchemy has provided the basis for modern chemistry. Wrapped in elaborate codes, symbols, and metaphors that still remain open to interpretation, this Art depends upon the idea of transformation from lower to higher states of being. The common perception of the Art rests upon its old claim of turning lead into gold; in reality, though, that claim is both metaphor and a way of scamming money to fund alchemical pursuits. Sure, a skilled alchemist might indeed use Matter magick to change lead into gold; on a deeper level, however, the lead is the alchemist and the gold represents self-perfection.

Although its common name comes from an Arabic practice, alchemy has several different forms: the Taoist Arts of sublime energies, the medieval European "lead into gold" vocation, the Islamic refinement-of-self through the keys left by Allah in the hands of wise men, the roots of those Arts in Classical Greece and Egypt, the early forms of modern chemistry, the complex pharmacopeia of South American mystics, the postmodern psychotropic experiments of transhumanist philosopher-chemists, and probably a few more forms as well. A 21st-century alchemist might study several of these disciplines, formulating new variations on ancient principles. Alchemy, after all, focuses on learning-based perfection. The practitioner's mind and body transform themselves through practicing the Art.

Aside from its chemical applications (poisons, psychoactives, explosives, and so forth), alchemy isn't really a fighter's Art. Its techniques demand patience, time, and a dedicated workspace. As a result, Ascension War alchemists tend to craft Wonders and compounds that come in handy when things get tense. And because it's not really difficult to turn lead into gold if you know what you're doing, such mages tend to be quite rich... with all the resources that wealth implies.

In all its forms, alchemy demands discipline. An alchemist studies principles, experiments with materials, deciphers codes, puzzles over symbols, works in his lab, creates useful goodies, and constantly challenges and refines himself. For him, the practical applications of alchemy – drugs, acids, and other chemical compounds; quick wits; foreign languages; and other techniques of transformation – take a back seat to the self-perfection at the core of this venerable Art.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Data; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Art, Crafts, Cryptography, Enigmas, Esoterica, Medicine, Pharmacopeia, Science (chemistry)

Common Instruments: Books, brews and potions, designs, devices, drugs, formulas, laboratories

The Art of Desire/ Hypereconomics

Known in the Renaissance as *Ars Cupiditae*, the Art of Desire focuses upon achieving your desires through finding out what other *people* desire and then using that knowledge to enact your Will. Like alchemy (and most other forms of magick, art, and science), this discipline involves plenty of self-perfection: athletic exercise, meditation, mental gymnastics, self-reflection, etiquette, and other social graces. Fashionable clothes, subtle yet influential cosmetics, poise and grace, martial arts, seduction, intimidation, and the trappings of wealth and refinement provide essential tools for this practice. Although it's most readily associated with the Syndicate and its original form as the High Guild, the Art of Desire has adherents throughout the mortal and Awakened worlds.

Essentially, Ars Cupiditae converts desire to reality. What you *want*, you make *happen*. A devotee nurtures her desires and the desires of other people, then uses them to advance her agenda for Reality as a whole. An Art of value, this practice draws connections between people and places, reads emotions and influences thoughts, manipulates the physical and mental states of both the mage and her subjects, and directs probability and material toward a greater goal. As a result, this Art favors the Spheres of Correspondence, Entropy, Life, Matter, Mind, and Prime, using them as parts of a useful, interlocking whole.

An eminently cultured practice, Ars Cupiditae draws upon a mixture of Asian, European, and Middle Eastern social and philosophical technologies. A practitioner of Desire rarely comes across as a mage at all – she's more Nikita than Hermione. Although certain Ecstatics and Hermetic wizards favor this approach, and modern Ngoma and Taftani use it to command urban commerce and culture, a devotee of this Art employs social influence, economic wizardry, and sheer personal excellence in order to get what she wants. Such mages rarely use violence themselves, leaving the dirty work to paid enforcers. If and when a practitioner needs to get her hands messy, though, her athletic prowess and advanced technology prove that she's no corner-office pushover.

A related practice, **hypereconomics**, refines the Art of Desire into social and global control. By exploring and exploiting desires and values within a given group, a hypereconomist can sense the Primal Energies of want and need within that group and then turn them to her advantage. An arcane practice understood mostly by Syndicate reps and the occasional Virtual Adept, hypereconomics provides an excellent vehicle for Entropy, Mind, and Prime Effects, channeled through social and mathematical activities so subtle that few people even recognize that their lives are being altered. Almost always coincidental (gross violations of Consensus Reality are considered cheap), hypereconomics remains a closely guarded secret in the 21st-century reality wars.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; Bring Back the Golden Age; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything is Data; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion; Tech Holds All Answers

Left- and Right-Hand Paths

Originally named by Europeans trying to differentiate between separate approaches to Tantric practices, the terms *Left-Hand Path* and *Right-Hand Path* have come to reflect an outlaw approach to mysticism and a reverent approach to it, respectively. Supposedly, Left-Hand mystics favor sensuality, hedonism, intoxication, and other forms of disreputable bliss, whereas Right-Hand adherents prefer asceticism, reverence, denial, and other forms of disciplined devotion.

In truth, mystic practices (especially Tantra) are more complex than that simplified (and westernized) division between so-called bad and good behaviors. Even so, the distinction between Left- and Right-Hand approaches crops up a lot when people talk about crazy wisdom, witchcraft, chaos magick, and other practices that include socially questionable activities alongside socially approved ones.

Certainly, some activities *are* more destructive than others, and magick *does* have consequences, like Resonance, that reach further than the moment of that act. Still, the division of Left- and Right-Hand magick tends to drop a Christianized gloss on practices that might be far older than Christianity and lack its simplistic bad/ good moral polarity. Some modern mages employ that term as shorthand for their approach, but others avoid its easy answers to complicated questions.

Associated Abilities: Academics (culture, philosophy, psychology), Athletics, Awareness, Carousing, Etiquette, Expression, Finance, Intimidation, Leadership, Martial Arts, Media, Politics, Seduction, Subterfuge

Common Instruments: Cards and dice, cosmetics, (very refined) dance and gestures, eye contact, fashion, gadgets, mass media, money and wealth, sex, social domination, vehicles, voice, weapons

Chaos Magick

It's not what you think it is. Although the term "chaos magic" tends to be associated with demons and evil, occultists understand chaos *magick* as a postmodern and often improvisational Art. Like other mystic practices, it emphasizes knowledge, reflection, and other forms of self-improvement. This revolutionary inversion of traditional mystic disciplines, however, depends upon personal intuition and interpretation; individual freedom; a deliberately iconoclastic approach; and an often subversive use of pop-culture symbols, social behaviors, and improvised designs.

Chaos magick spits in the face of established dogma. Often regarded by outsiders as a *Left-Hand Path*, it's a sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll sort of practice, raising and directing personal energy (that is, Quintessence) through extreme experiences. Obviously, this sort of thing appeals to Cultists of Ecstasy, whose more formal practices – Tantra, vision questing, ordeals, and ***crazy wisdom*** (see below) – have been integrated into the chaos-magick potpourri. Even that diverse culture, however, is too confining for many chaos practitioners, whose embrace of the *Chaosphere* – the whirling fractal of absolute existence – resists confinement in any form.

Playful yet serious, each chaos-magick practice draws from the individual practitioner's experiences and desires. Depending upon the individual practitioner, it can integrate formalized ritual or involve spontaneous improvisation... or both, or neither. Flexibility and personal investment are innate elements of the practice as a whole, often connected to psychic thought forms called *egregores*: concepts given reality through extensive investment of psychic energy. **(See the *Instruments* entry for *Thought Forms*, pp. 548-599.)** Some folks use toys and Tarot cards, whereas others draw sigils, craft graphic novels, run raves, stage flash mobs, and concoct elaborate pranks on society at large. Eris, Bob, the Flying Spaghetti Monster... these deities supplant the classic divinities in a chaotic pantheon whose figureheads are less concerned with worship than with inversion. Each mage, then, is a vortex of potential whose Will spins energy into being. And if this sounds too abstract to be useful, then you're thinking about it too hard.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion

Associated Abilities: Art, Awareness, Carousing, Computer, Esoterica, Expression, Lucid Dreaming, Meditation, Pharmacopeia, Streetwise, Technology

Common Instruments: Whatever works, so long as none of it becomes too stable or confining.

Craftwork

There are reasons that Hephaestus is a metalsmith, Jesus is a carpenter, and Ogun is said to be the iron "who always eats first." It's no accident that Freemasons remain one of the most respected yet feared societies around – a society responsible, in ways, for the foundation of the United States. Many myths peg humanity's origins to deities who fashioned us out of clay and then breathed life into their creations. That's because *craftwork* – the Art of making miracles out of raw materials – is among the first metaphysical practices.

Craftwork's mystique has been largely diminished in the industrial world... so much so that it's often farmed out to sweatshop labor or performed by machines (which hold their own ominous metaphysical connotations – witness the *Terminator* and *Matrix* sagas). Even so, there's something magical about that Geek Squad specialist who can fix your errant computer, the tattooed malcontent repairing your car, or that friend who forges swords or crafts costumes for the SCA. The heart of craftwork comes from an apparently

supernatural expertise with materials and tools – the ability to take bits of rock or skin or tree and then make lovely, useful objects from them.

Many mystics bridle at the thought of crediting craftsmanship as a magical practice. After all, the Technocracy began as a bunch of disgruntled Craftmasons who shaped the machines that ended the High Mythic Age, so why should such people be considered mages? And yet, that prejudice ignores the legendary ties between craftwork and the mystic Arts: the legacies of Solomon's temple and the masons who built it, of the temples whose sacred geometries invited gods to dwell within them, the shapers of iron, gold, and stone who brought humanity out of caves and into cities of their own design. Even the Industrial Era has a sense of magick – the sleek glare of glass towers, the hellish factory glamour, the enchanting pixel dance that comes from computers, TVs, and the Internet... all of which demand craftwork in their creation, maintenance, and eventual dismantling into recycled components. That Art might be taken for granted these days, but it's still magickal to those who understand it.

As a practice, craftsmanship combines the physical and mental skills involved in various crafts (carpentry, metalsmithing, glasswork, plastics, leatherworking, and so forth), then combines them with Pattern Arts in order to make those materials better than they'd been before. Matter presents the obvious Sphere for such disciplines, but Forces (to command fire, air, electricity, gravity, and the like), Prime (to energize and strengthen those creations), and often Life (to work living or organic tissue) and Entropy (to spot, add, or banish flaws) are more-or-less essential too. Old-school crafters employ Spirit to Awaken or placate the spirits within the materials – an important process in ancient craftwork, which depended upon the goodwill of gods and spirits in order to succeed. And although the rituals of creation demand time, materials, and expertise, the results – from glass vessels to armored tanks – can last for centuries... or even, as with the pyramids, millennia.

A typical crafter-mage seems rough around the edges compared to her more academic peers. Often physically strong and personally abrupt, she can be perceived as boorish and dull. That's a common but mistaken view. In her chosen craft, this mage is every bit as sharp and knowledgeable as her book-bound contemporaries... most of whom would be lost without her expertise. And although common prejudices view such mages as members of the Technocracy (not without some truth), a crafter is just as likely to be a stonesmith Verbena, an ironworking Ngoma, an artisan Hermetic, or a VA computer tech. The Taftani weavers earned that name from

their physical skills as well as their mystical ones, and the Ngoma preserve the practical skills as well as the magical rites from their Egyptian/ Nubian origins. Even Akashayana employ craft Arts in their martial practices – see the film *The Man With the Iron Fists* for several examples. Though often forgotten in the catalogs of magic, craftwork is as old as humanity yet as fresh as the laptop at your fingertips.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics, Arts, Computers, Crafts, Energy Weapons, Esoterica (sacred geometry, quantum mathematics, elemental pacts, stone and metal lore), Hypertech, Research, Science, Technology

Common Instruments: Artwork, blood, books, computers and IT gear, devices and machines, elements, gadgets, household and crafting tools, laboratories and workshops, symbols, weapons (hammers, blades, sickles, guns, etc.)

Crazy Wisdom

A mage who gets a little bit out of her head when performing magick might use what's often called the *crazy wisdom* practice: deliberately irrational activities that supposedly grant wisdom by shattering established concepts of what is and is not possible and real.

Another sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll approach to magick, crazy wisdom often involves psychoactive entheogens, trance-inducing music, vision quests, risky ordeals, sexual excess, gender inversions, social misrule, mass ecstatic rituals, and solitary isolation in which the practitioner turns her own personal reality inside out and then ponders what that means. Although it's technically undisciplined by the standards of more rigid forms of magick, such behavior provides a potent tool for enlightenment... assuming it doesn't kill you first!

Although its obvious adherents come from the Cult of Ecstasy, crazy wisdom has a long and respected history as part of shamanism, voodoo, witchcraft, and even certain High Ritual practices. The Order of Hermes has its own variation – the *Antinomian Praxis* – in which a mage smashes taboos, violates her own standards, and breaks through constraints to find what lies beyond them. Drawing strength from its obvious contradictions, crazy wisdom is dangerous, disruptive, often scary, and potentially lethal. That's kind of the point, though danger isn't always involved. Mystic contraries and genderqueers, who deliberately invert social expectations about identity and gender, practice a form of crazy wisdom on a social scale, fucking with people's preconceptions in order to show greater possibilities. This is the Trickster's Path, breaking on through like Jim Morrison in a mosh pit with Patti Smith, Br'er Rabbit, the Cat in the Hat, and several buckets of paint.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith; One-Way Trip to Oblivion

Associated Abilities: Art, Athletics, Carousing, Esoterica, Lucid Dreaming, Meditation, Pharmacopeia, Survival

Common Instruments: Blood and body fluids, bones and remains, brain/ computer interface, dance, drugs, music, ordeals, sex and sensuality, social domination, thought forms, toys, tricks and illusions, voice

Cybernetics

When organic machines get wedded to mechanical machines, the synergy called *cybernetics* raises the human animal to a whole new level. On a broader plane, cybernetics reaches beyond mere flesh and machine to embrace the technologies of communication, language, electrical impulses, complex systems, and thought itself. Drawn from a Greek phrase meaning "to steer or govern," cybernetic practices employ complex interactive systems – computers, electronics, prosthetics, mathematical formulae, linguistics, philosophy, even social dynamics – to extend the practitioner's control... first over his own reality, and then over the reality of other systems and entities.

Essentially, the cybernetic practice views Creation as a vast machine whose systems can be understood and manipulated with sufficient dedication. For many adherents – like the members of Iteration X – that dedication includes merging their bodies with mechanical components. Other practitioners, though, use cybernetics as a theoretical construct – a model through which calculations, psychology, symbols, and external devices and machines (as opposed to implanted ones) can bend probability (through Entropy), change minds (the Mind Sphere), transform materials (Life and Matter), channel energies (Forces and Prime), and redefine temporal physics... or, in plain English, reroute Time.

Despite the dated overuse of "cyber" as an adjective, cybernetics remains a bleeding-edge discipline. Rooted in Chinese, Greek, and Arab technologies, this discipline blossomed during the Industrial Revolution and hasn't stopped blooming yet. In the 21st century, whole nations are composed of cyborgs – smart-phone-using, video-watching, TV-nurtured, socially networked machine-people whose relationships and realities are defined by the 24/7 interface of our Information Era. And although the science-fiction landscape of depersonalized drones looks nothing like the world as we know it now, every element of life in our new millennium depends upon a complex interplay of cybernetic forces that very few people truly understand... and that even fewer – aside from certain technomancers – can control.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; Everything is Data; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics, Biotech, Computer, Crafts, Energy Weapons, Hypertech, Media, Politics, Science, Technology

Common Instruments: Books, brain/ computer interface, computers and IT gear, devices and machines, gadgets, inventions, laboratories, languages, mass media, nanotech, numbers and numerology, weapons, writing and inscriptions

Dominion

Social domination might just be the oldest form of magick. At its most basic levels, this practice directs animal instincts and human interactions toward the will (and Will) of the dominant party. Although other practices – notably Ars Cupiditae, shamanism, and High Ritual Magick – draw upon these techniques of domination, a raw assertion of command is the foundation of capital-A Authority... most notably among the New World Order.

Rarely considered "magick" in the usual sense, the dominion practice employs inner discipline, social control, a cultivated understanding of behavior and governance, significant words and symbols, the trappings of power and authority, and a host of verbal and physical tricks that keep the practitioner on top of a given situation. At its lowest form, it's the art of the abuser, con-man, and pick-up artist. Its techniques come into play through office and sexual politics and often form part of any strong parent's arsenal. On a metaphysical level, dominion taps into the primal need for leadership and parenting, then directs that need with a conscious eye toward overwhelming control. Through that control, in turn, you command Reality because you *believe* you do, and you make other folks believe you do as well.

A serious practitioner of dominion (that is, a mage) goes beyond crude intimidation, studying the deeper applications of social domination and self-perfection. Like a devotee of desire, he learns how to maximize his personal strengths and minimize his social flaws while taking full advantage of another party's weaknesses and appealing to their need to be protected and led. Like Ars Cupiditae concentrates upon desire, the discipline of dominion concentrates upon command. The techniques can seem rather arcane, especially when they're combined with religious and/ or philosophical beliefs; it's through technology, however, that dominion finds its greatest influence. Queen Victoria was a master of this Art... and though she used technological instruments to get her point across, she exerted such a charismatic mystique that we still use her name to define the age she ruled.

Skilled dominion practitioners employ eye contact, body language, vocal tactics, peer pressure, social appeal, and resonant symbols (uniforms, weapons, parental behavior, religious iconography) in order to cow their herd. From there, these alphas enact their Will in both a mundane and Awakened sense. Lots of mages use social techniques, but a dominion master takes them to a metaphysical extent, wresting control of Reality itself through mass domination – an Art of Kings that has shaped past history and continues to do so today.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics (history, psychology), Art, Belief Systems, Empathy, Expression, Intimidation, Leadership, Media, Politics, Seduction, Technology

Common Instruments: Art, brain/ computer interface, eye contact, fashion, group rites, languages, mass media, music, social domination, symbols, thought forms, tricks and illusions, voice

Faith

Through faith, all things are possible. This saying underscores the essence of what might be the most common mystic practice in the world: devotion to a higher source. Drawn from the Latin word *fides* – "loyalty, trust, belief" – faith provides the foundation for many other practices, yet it stands as a practice in its own right. For although witches, shamans, Voudoun practitioners, and even scientists might be faithful to their higher power, faith itself provides comfort and power for those who believe.

Often regarded as the core of overtly religious sects like the Celestial Chorus and Ahl-i-Batin, faith can inspire and energize any mage. Even the demonic Nephandi maintain faith in their horrific Absolute or the Infernal entities they adore. Faith, you see, provides the believer with stability and purpose. And although magick is often seen as an egotistical practice, faith ideally removes the ego in favor of that greater Source. The faithful mage says "*THY Will be done*," then acts as an instrument for that Divine Will.

For a mage of faith, the actions she takes and the Arts she pursues all represent the ideals of her higher power. In most cases, those ideals come through a religion – a binding that unites Divinity with the people of the faith. Not all faithful people, though, are religious; strictly speaking, religion is a social institution, whereas faith is a personal connection. Even science – often seen these days as an enemy of faith – can be a devotional practice. The foundations of modern science, historically, were laid by men and women of faith who used their discoveries to delve into, and then to reveal, the glories of their God.

A faithful magus follows the tenets of her creed, maintains contact with her source through prayer, and acts – as often as possible – as an emissary of her creed's ideals. "Keeping the faith" means pursuing virtues that supposedly please the higher power, and although the particulars depend upon the specific creed (a Franciscan Catholic, a Shi'a devotee, and an Odinist *spá-kona* all have *very* different ideas about virtue!), the mage's adherence to that creed is essential. "Faith" does, after all, mean *loyalty*.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith!

Associated Abilities: Academics (tenets of faith), Awareness, Belief Systems, Cosmology, Empathy, Enigmas, Esoterica, Expression, Medicine

Common Instruments: Blessings and curses, books (scriptures), cups and vessels, energy, food and drink, group rites, music, offerings and sacrifice, ordeals and exertions, prayers and invocations, sacred iconography, symbols, thought forms, voice, writings and inscriptions

Gutter Magick

The most practical magick practice is the one that uses whatever you've got to work with. Sure, wizards and cyborgs and Enlightened tycoons can afford all the best ritual gear around. What happens, though, when you're more or less broke? Homeless, maybe? Living in a squat or stuck on the street or getting by as part of the working poor? Well then, you use gutter magick, the craft of making do.

Composed of odds and ends with symbolic connotations, gutter magick features coins, cards, toys, scraps, bottles, cans, nails, junk, graffiti, and things crafted out of the cast-offs of consumer society. Dead TVs, old magazines, cardboard boxes, gnawed chicken bones, sacrificed rats and alley cats, old clothes repurposed and restyled with feral urban flair... such instruments direct the Will of the truly destitute. On the next rung up the socioeconomic ladder, lower-class mages use cheap tricks, cheesy clothes, New Age books, action figures, and other tokens of postmodern mall-magic. When invested with Awakened intentions, these otherwise useless trinkets provide focus for orphans, Hollowers, and other mystics with more ambition than resources.

As with many other mystic practices, art forms a potent force in gutter magick. Hip-hop culture, Gothic rock, the various flavors of heavy metal, the blues, neotribal, techno-industrial, and even country/ western music styles provide soundtracks for the mystic side of the urban scene. Inside the clubs, dancing and drugs create hypnotic atmospheres in which it often seems like *anything* could happen. A paranormal survival tactic, gutter magick skulks in the shadows of the alley between respectability and forbidden Arts. Gutter magick proves that you don't need high wizardry and ancient tomes in order to get attention (if not necessarily respect) from the spirit world. In its darker elements, such magick employs guns, blades, cheap sex and cheaper booze, crimes and punishments, madness and desperation. Though not exactly new in form, it's a common practice in the new millennium.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion

Associated Abilities: Animal Kinship (rats, cats, crows, etc.), Area Knowledge, Art, Crafts, Expression, Firearms, Intimidation, Pharmacopeia, Streetwise, Survival (urban), Technology

Common Instruments: Artwork, blood and fluids, bones and remains, cards and dice, dance, drugs and poisons, eye contact, fashion, herbs and plants, household tools, music, offerings and sacrifice, sex, social domination, symbols, thought forms, toys, tricks and illusions, weapons, vehicles

High Ritual Magick

To achieve excellence, one must have perfection. To work one's Will, one must have the discipline to master that Will and then direct it with utmost confidence. In an outsider's perspective, the rigorous devotees of High Ritual Magick (all capitalized) are a pretentious pack of OCD pricks. For those devotees, however, the truth is plain: you must be strong, courageous, disciplined, and wise to unlock Creation's power. High Ritual Magick demands those qualities.

In High Ritual Magick, everything has significance: the alignment of planets, the tone of words, the calculations necessary to discover the correct number of times to repeat certain phrases, the formalities of address, and the measure or angle of materials aligned *just so* for maximum effect. That precision has a dual purpose: in one regard, the relationship of those many elements is crucial for success. In the other regard, the precision tests and challenges the magician, forcing him to overcome his flaws and become the superior person whom such intricacies demand. This practice is both an Art *and* a Science whose expertise has withstood the tests of time. You cannot be weak or sloppy or stupid, goes the reasoning, if you wish to work your Will upon Creation. Only the smartest, the bravest, the most refined people are capable of True High Magick, and so the rituals and their elaborate preparations discourage everyone who lacks the excellence to succeed.

(This mindset also explains the condescending attitude for which High Ritual Magicians are so infamous. Although they don't *all* feel this way, many such wizards believe that other practitioners have not earned the *right* to work True Magick. Lesser mages, to them, are like drunken kids speeding down dark mountain roads with Daddy's car, an expired learner's permit, and the wizard strapped in the back seat, unable to avoid the coming crash.)

Though often associated with medieval Europe, High Ritual Magick has many forms, all of them refined by civilized urban cultures. China's ritual magick boasts Confucian complexity, and rites from Egypt and Mesopotamia provide the centerpiece for the Western occult traditions of Greece, Rome, Persia, Israel, and Arabia. Nubia's ritual Arts remain a closely guarded secret, held by the Ngoma as a timeless inheritance. Tibet, India, and Japan all have sublime ritual practices, whereas North American occultism blends Old World sophistication with New World eclecticism. The harsh rituals of South America have largely been lost, thanks to Spanish conquerors... and yet, in secret corners of Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, and Peru, sects preserve those Aztec, Maya, and Incan practices.

In all forms, High Ritual Magick demands preparation, discipline, and the finest materials a magician can acquire. Such practices connect the mage with greater powers – gods, angels, demons, elementals, and the faceless forces of the universe – and those powers demand respect. The wizard, too, must earn respect; such powers do not answer to fools. In practical terms, High Ritual Magick is slow and precise. The wizard might call upon the *results* of his prior work in the heat of the moment, but those results – enchanted wands, crafted staves, precious amulets, mystic scrolls, imprisoned demons, angelic favors, priceless statues, carved jade pendants, Otherworldly gates, fine robes, imposing tomes – must be prepared well in advance.

Despite all those trappings, an accomplished Ritual Magus understands that it is *his* Will that commands those elements. He

does not hope or beg – he commands. Spirits can be bargained with, dragons might be conjured, God Himself might slip the mage a favor, but in the end all of those parties respect the High Magus because, ultimately, he has shaped *himself* into the true instrument of Will.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Data; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics, Belief Systems, Cosmology, Crafts, Expression, Esoterica, Investigation, Leadership, Meditation, Occult, Research

Common Instruments: Books, celestial alignments, circles and designs, computers (for modern wizards), cups and vessels, elements, eye contact, fashion, gems, gestures, languages (Latin, Sanskrit, Mandarin, Greek, etc.), meditation, numbers and numerology, offerings and sacrifices, prayer and invocations, social domination, symbols, thought forms, True Names, wands and staves, weapons (swords and knives), writing and inscriptions

Hypertech

A catch-all term for the hundreds of methods used to unite advanced technology with visionary ideas, hypertech represents a dynamic approach to science. Despite the rumblings of disgruntled old-school mystics, this approach has transformed the world we live in. Computers, obviously, reflect the most obvious aspects of this Art and Science, but the brute force of metallurgy, the explosive powers of internal combustion, the harnessed lightning of electronic technologies, and the heady physics behind it all drive hypertech and humanity to new and exciting frontiers. "*Oh, THAT'S not magick*," sniff the critics... but actually, it *is*. It's not Hermetic wizardry, after all, that gave us cars, phones, computers, and electronic power... all those things, and more, began as hypertech.

The hypertech practice reflects the genius of the human condition – that restless striving to perfect and understand. In earlier forms (like those employed by the Order of Reason), such "godless" Arts were reflections of deep reverence. Men and women of God sought the keys to His Creations, seeing divine glory in every twig or flower. The technologies of China, Greece, and Persia reflected mystic aspirations too. It's no accident that so many scientific names come from old gods and Classical mythologies, and although modern science emphasizes proof over faith, there's still plenty of room for wonder in this world.

At the core of this practice – in its many applications, from cloning and biotech to astrophysics, mechanical engineering, chemistry, theoretical physics, and far more – hypertech is about potential... finding it, recognizing it, expanding upon it to create something even better than what we had before. A scientist understands that she doesn't have all the answers and so constantly seeks them out. She'll spend endless hours in the lab or reading journals – not so that she can turn humanity into drones, but so that she can bring something *better* into being. Despite its apparent sterility, hypertech retains a visionary optimism.

Although the scientist might believe in some Creator, she's not shackled to blind faith. Instead, she employs rigorous tests, complicated data, consistent verification, and an Art founded not on chance or outside whims but upon tested principles and concrete achievements. She's the Progenitor, the Adept, the technomancer whose tools reflect the precision of her Arts. Unlike her deluded counterparts who practice their ***weird science***, this visionary employs solid protocols for dependable results. In a way, she's the High Ritual Magus of our age, making wonders with vigorous Science.

(For more about the range of hypertech potential, see the ***Science*** Trait and the ***SCIENCE!!!*** sidebar in **Chapter Six**.)

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything is Data; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics, Computer, Crafts, Hypertech, Investigation, Medicine, Research, Science, Technology

Common Instruments: Books, brain/ computer interface, computers, devices and machines, household tools, inventions, laboratories, nanotech, writing, and the many tools of technological achievement

Maleficia

Certain magicks are deliberately cruel. Cast with malicious intentions, they're intended to cause harm and distress. Medieval law called such Arts *maleficia* – "evil-doing" – and that's appropriate. For though most conceptions of witchcraft are mistaken, there *are* people who use bad magick for bad ends.

When folks think of black magic, they're referring to this deliberately obscene practice... although any form of magick can be hurtful, maleficia is intentionally crafted toward malignant aims. Curses; possessions; damnations; invocations to malevolent powers; infernal pacts, inhuman abilities; violations of body, mind, and spirit... such is the realm of maleficia. Other forms of corruption, too, can be invoked through this form of magick: wealth spells, sexual enchantments, techniques of social dominance, and all manner of metaphysical abuses can be conjured with help from sinister powers. These practices have no set form but range from the petty desecrations of teenage devilheads to the arcane ceremonies of ancient Infernal cults. Although the Nephandi seem to be the obvious offenders in this regard, anyone with a sufficiently bent motivation can employ a form of maleficia. The evangelist who calls upon his congregation to pray for the death of some hated figure is invoking maleficia; the forbidden Hermetic rites for summing demons employ it too. The Black Masses present pretty obvious examples; what's less obvious, though, is that the Catholic Church itself has a history of Requiem Masses, performed to kill living people, and Amatory Masses, intended to compel affections upon unwilling people. The *Grimoire of Honorius* – attributed to a Pope – features Masses to be performed for evil purposes. Just as any mystic practice can inflict harm, so too can any mystic practice become twisted into maleficia.

As a practice, maleficia features deliberate cruelty and perversion. Sex, for example, is a sacrament in certain traditions, but malefic practices use sex in its most tortured and nonconsensual forms. Sacrifices become as brutal and horrific as possible; prayers are spoken backwards; sacred symbols and objects are deliberately defiled through acts of defiant malevolence. Technology might play a part as well, as an instrument of torture, a method of access, or a channel for disruptive acts and energies. Music concerts, computer hacking, media broadcasts, machines... all could be employed as instruments of black magic.

For obvious reasons, maleficia tends to leave nasty Resonance behind. That combination of sick deeds and ugly intentions poisons everything it touches. Rooms, tools, and people feel tainted after a malefic rite; even Sleepers can sense that something's not right about such things. The mage can clean up every physical trace of the crime, but a metaphysical essence lingers... often attracting corrupt entities that pick up where the malefactor left off...

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion

Associated Abilities: Cosmology, Enigmas, Esoterica, Expression, Intimidation, Melee, Occult, Pharmacopeia, Seduction, Torture

Common Instruments: Artwork, blood and fluids, bodywork, bones and remains (often fresh), circles and designs, cups and vessels, curses, elements, eye contact, drugs and poisons, gems and valuables, group rites, music, offerings and sacrifice, prayers and invocations, sex (typically nonconsensual), voice, weapons

Martial Arts

The human machine is a miracle whose vast potential is hampered by undisciplined habits and acquired behaviors. Martial arts expand upon that potential, unlocking the deeper physical and metaphysical abilities of body, mind, and spirit. Although such arts, at the basic levels, simply help a person strike or move more effectively in a fight, the higher reaches of martial-arts discipline go far beyond physical combat, into the realm of mental focus and spiritual refinement.

Although the obvious example of self-perfection through martial arts is kung fu (roughly translated as "hard work" or "auspicious effort art"), most martial arts have esoteric elements. Renaissance fencing features philosophy, psychology, and mathematics as well as physical skill; Greek pankration emphasizes being "all powerful" in all respects; capoeira relies upon the *essence* of freedom as well as on the acrobatic maneuvers for which it's famous. Advanced martial arts, therefore, nurture the spirit, hone the mind, and turn the body into a focus for the powers of each.

At their most metaphysical levels, advanced martial arts attune a practitioner into the Quintessential life force, channel it through refined motions, and grant incredible – some would say inhuman – powers through the focus of an art. The Akashic practice Do is probably the most obvious example of this practice on a metaphysical level, but any martial art – even dirty fighting – can become a magickal practice with the proper mindset and devotion. (See **Chapter Nine**'s sections dealing with ***Martial Arts*** and ***Do***.) Essentially, the artist manifests her will through clarity, energy, and activity. In game terms, she uses that art as a mystic focus.

Beyond their mystic elements, martial arts are also technologies: refinements of knowledge that can be studied, repeated, and employed with practical effect. Thus, Technocrats and other technomancers can employ martial arts as a focus too.

Regarding all that mystic nonsense as metaphors and mental techniques, a technomancer can divorce her martial arts training from mysticism and still retain its metaphysical potency. With such powers, she can direct Forces, alter Life, rearrange Matter, perceive Entropy, channel Prime, enhance Time, and – perhaps most of all – refine her Mind to sublime capacity. Although she couldn't fly through the air or skip along tree branches by manipulating chi ("*That's just mythology!*"), she can still rework conventional physics and biology through her understanding of the fighting arts.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Acrobatics, Alertness, Athletics, Awareness, Esoterica, Etiquette, Intimidation, Martial Arts, Medicine, Meditation, Melee

Common Instruments: Bodywork, dance and movement, energy, herbs, meditation, ordeals and exertions, symbols, wands and staves, weapons, voice

Medicine Work

Next to parenting, healing might be the highest human vocation. Many mages – mystics and technomancers alike – view their Enlightenment as an obligation to heal. To heal the planet, heal the people, heal the spirits, heal the Earth... perhaps all of them at once, if that's at all possible. And so one of the oldest and most sacred Paths an Awakened person can pursue involves the practice of medicine work.

Simply put, a medicine-person directs his skills and energies toward a healing practice. He might be the Progenitor physician, the Verbena root-witch, the Bata'a houngan, the Templar medic... it's not the *group* that matters, or even the medical practice, when it comes to the abilities of a skillful mage. A shaman with Life 3 can fix a broken leg as well as a Progenitor with the same level of Spheres. For the purposes of magickal practice, the term *medicine work* refers to the *intent to heal* and the *choice of techniques that enhance healing*, not to the specific method a mage uses when healing injuries or disease.

Human medicine is an ever-evolving technology. Things we take for granted as medical facts were unknown half a century ago, whereas certain proven truths of conventional Western medicine ignore equally proven truths of alternative, non-industrialized medicines. A well-rounded healer in today's world would probably understand Western technological medicine; Tibetan *So Rig* techniques; faith-based spiritual methods; Indian *Ayurveda* ("the science of life"); Japanese reiki and Swedish massage; the vast synergy of modern Chinese medicine; the Persian, Greek, and Arab roots of conventional medicine; current holistic theories; experimental machine technology, and other techniques besides. Few healers, of course, have the time or access to study such a broad range of disciplines – many of which clash with one another on a philosophical level. Instead, the healer picks a specific approach and then directs his attentions... and *in*tentions... toward the path that works best for him.

Thanks to magick (especially the Life, Entropy, Mind, and Prime Spheres), *any* form of medicine can work for an Awakened healer who employs that medicine as a focus, *so long as that mage BELIEVES in that form of medicine*. An Iroquois member of the Society of Faces would feel as lost in a Progenitor biotech facility as a Progenitor would feel when hefting a medicine mask. *Both techniques work* in the hands of a mage who understands and trusts those techniques, but few healers trust both of those techniques with equal faith. And so, when choosing medicine work as a magickal practice, the player needs to define what *sort* of medicine his character employs. (We encourage players to research actual medical practices from different cultures. The facts are as fascinating as any constructed fantasy!)

It's worth mentioning that traditional Native American and African mages often abhor the idea of using magic. In many cultures, "magick" is either trickery or the influence of malignant spirits. *Medicine* is a more accurate and respectful term for what such people do than *magick* is... hence, the phrase *medicine man*. Many "shamans" actually consider themselves to be medicine people, using their Arts to nurture and restore the world, not to make it dance to their whims.

For the practical effects of Sphere-based healing, see ***Health and Injury*** in **Chapter Nine**, (pp. 406-409).

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics (healing practices), Art (masks, dance, music, etc.), Awareness, Empathy, Esoterica (herbalism, energy work, bodywork, healing and meditative practices), Medicine, Meditation, Pharmacopeia, Science, Technology

Common Instruments: Artwork, blessings and curses, blood and fluids, bodywork, bones and remains, books, brews and concoctions, computers, cups and vessels, dance and movement, devices and machines, drugs and poisons, group rites (operations), herbs, laboratories, languages (Latin, jargon, and that weird script doctors use when writing prescriptions), meditation, music, offerings and sacrifices, prayers and invocations, social domination, voice, weapons (surgical instruments)

Reality Hacking

Imaginative people can do imaginative things with supposedly static structures. Hacking them apart to reconfigure those structures, these people use various tools – technology, philosophy, art, politics, and, occasionally, magick – to remake what *was* into *what can be*. With the correct gear and the right ideas, you don't even need to be a mage in order to hack the dominant paradigm... just ask Osama bin Laden's ghost. When you *are* a mage, however, you can employ those tools to remake Reality on a grand scale.

Typically associated with the Virtual Adepts (and, to a lesser extent, the Cult of Ecstasy), the reality-hacking practice can be used by any mage with the proper mindset and expertise. The core idea – *reality is flexible* – seems familiar enough these days. As a practice, reality hacking uses an array of technologies to rework the systems that govern our world: its commerce, politics, media, memes, connections, faiths, physics, and so forth. By concentrating on specific systems and ideas, the mage can start remixing expectations into some new and interesting shape.

Sound like anarchy? Sometimes it is. Many of this practice's oldest adherents and principles, however, come from the Order of Reason and Technocratic Order. After all, it was early Technocrats who hacked the human concepts of the universe, God, governments, and other technologies. Technocrats shaped fencing (a sword-fighting hack), the physical sciences (an elemental hack), exploration (a geographic hack), mass media (a consciousness hack), and the space program (a planetary hack). It's no accident that the Virtual Adepts and Society of Ether began as Technocratic Conventions. And despite their unruly applications of technology, they're just keeping that old hacker ethic alive.

(Ironically, one could argue that the Order of Reason hacked the Traditions by replacing the High Mythic Ages with our industrial era. That idea would make a Black Suit chuckle, but he wouldn't disagree.)

The postmodern reality hacker tends to employ information technologies – not simply computers, but also memes, media, and other forms of mass intellectual access. As demonstrated by 9/11, she doesn't have to be a computer nerd – simply a visionary who notes the weakness of a structure and the method that exploits it. The transhumanist idea of reality as information – epitomized by the ***Data*** and ***Primal Utility Spheres*** (see pp. 524-527) – provides leverage for a reality hacker mage. Channeling her ideas and energies through computer code, social media, videos, slogans, pranks, guerilla theatre, movies and videos, graphic novels, music, fashions, Internet memes, and the clever manipulation of vibrant symbols (masks, puppets, iconography, remixed media, and so forth), that mage can re-contextualize reality as the Masses understand it, then take advantage of those new perceptions. It's not as quick or gratifying as a thunderbolt, but it tends to be a hell of a lot more powerful... and more coincidental, too.

Like cybernetics, dominion, and the Art of Desire (all related practices), reality hacking aims more toward influence than raw force. The reality hacker strives to modify the system to her advantage, rather than blast it apart. Even so, certain tools – like terrorism and atrocity – can be incredibly violent in both implementation and results. Even then, however, that violence serves as an *extension and instrument* of the hack; the power of terrorism, for example, comes more from the atmosphere of dread and fury than from the casualties themselves. Sphere-wise, reality hacking favors Correspondence (for drawing and exploiting connections), Entropy (for spotting flaws and arranging probabilities), Forces (directing or destroying electrical systems), Mind (influencing ideas and the folks who have them), Life (rewiring the human animal), Prime (drawing, raising, and directing energy), and Time (re-contextualizing the perceptions of time), and uses instruments that express and subvert those principles in the modern world.

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything is Data; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics (history, philosophy, social sciences), Art, Belief Systems, Computer, Expression, Government, Media, Politics, Science (psychology as well as physical sciences), Subterfuge, Technology

Common Instruments: Artwork, books, brain/computer interface, computers and IT gear, devices and machines, drugs, eye contact, group rites, language, mass media, money and wealth, music, nanotech, sex, social domination, symbols, thought forms, tricks and illusions, voice, weapons

Shamanism

We occupy a living world whose essence is greater and more intelligent than we recognize. Whereas common people stumble through material illusions, a shaman transcends both humanity *and* illusion. Moving through a world of layers and traps, he exists outside the everyday realm. And yet, through his guidance, the Sleeping People slumber more comfortably and the Awakened Ones remain more aware.

Perhaps the most abused word in magic, *shamanism* technically refers to a specific type of Siberian spirit-worker. Over time, however, it's come to define anyone who employs old-culture traditions to walk between the sublime world and its often ridiculous material counterpart. Dying – sometimes literally – to the life he led before he felt Called by the spirits, the shaman is reborn in a half-outcast state... mad by the standards of his previous society, yet aware of (if not always clear about) the true nature of Reality.

Because the shaman traditionally lives between the worlds of flesh and spirit, human and animal, matter and essence, sanity and dementia, conventionality and chaos, he embodies a living crossroads in which those qualities intersect. In many cases, he suffers from physical and/or psychological ailments, a wounded healer whose infirmities render him more sympathetic to other wounded souls. A shaman often depends upon other people and spiritual allies whose aid and guidance help him survive his strange existence. In return, he grants his allies healing, insight, action in realms they might not be able to reach unaided, and a powerful intercessor with parties they may not address alone. A soul guide, a prophet, a medicine bringer and spirit warrior, our shaman walks a sacred... if often *unpleasant*... Path.

Thanks to noble-savage nonsense, shamanism has a trippy popular image that's deeply at odds with the earthy and often bizarre nature of the shaman himself. In reality, shamanism is a gritty, anti-orthodox vocation, filled with deliberate contradictions and slippery concepts of sanity. A shaman often inverts ideas of propriety; cross-dressing, speaking in riddles,

or acting in deliberately crude or obnoxious ways in order to shake up or demolish preconceptions. These tools – as well as the usual masks, dances, and trappings one expects from a shaman – form the instruments of shamanic Arts. Folks who expect the dewy-eyed dreamer of New Age romanticism are in for a shock when they meet true shamans... and that shock, too, is part of the shaman's toolkit.

Although shamanism favors a naturalistic viewpoint, *technoshamanic* practices exist in the current era. Connecting with urbanized spirits (city-souls, electronic entities, machine-spirits, and so on) – frequently through computers, fast-food offerings, consumerism cast-offs, and other postmodernist talismans – the technoshaman blends ancient awareness with current technology, acting as a vessel to distill the essence of eternity into the power of today.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith!

Associated Abilities: Alertness, Art, Cosmology, Enigmas, Esoterica, Expression, Lucid Dreaming, Medicine, Pharmacopeia, Streetwise, Survival

Common Instruments: Blood and fluids, bones and remains, computers, dance, drugs and concoctions, elements, herbs, household tools, offerings and sacrifice, ordeals, sex and sensuality, thought forms, toys, True Names, voice, weapons

Voudoun

If "shamanism" is the most abused word in magick, then Voudoun might be the most abused *practice*. Drawn from a fusion of Central African faiths, Native American practices, European iconography, and the humid atrocity of American slave culture, the collection of "voodoo" creeds – *Macumba*, *Obeah*, *Candomblé*, *Voudoun*, *Santería*, Delta and Lower Appalachian *Hoodoo*, the various flavors of *Urban-American Voodoo*, and their many offshoots – continues to command uncanny fascination in the modern world. Distorted by a combination of secrecy, poverty, racism, psychological warfare, cultural marginalization, and certain unnerving elements that actually *do* exist within those practices, the popular image of Voudoun magick reflects its distinctly American character.

Essentially, a Voudoun mage's practice revolves around finding and revering allies in a treacherous world. Arriving in chains for lives of forced labor after a hellish passage in sea-borne underworlds, the Africans who were transported to the Americas had little to draw upon except faith, courage, and rage. Ripped away from their families, many of them lacked even a common language. From the bits and pieces of their new lives, these people crafted creeds that reflected the hopes and horrors of that world, peopled with new families to replace the ones they had lost. In that world, the worst thing that could happen was slavery *beyond* death... so the curses and creatures of Voudoun lore focused on imprisonment, servitude, crossings, hunger, defiance, and escape. Old gods, new spirits, and tales of elevated mortals attained the identities of *Loa*: the god-spirit kin of Voudoun practitioners. And so, even though slavery has been "officially" banished from the Americas (many folks, of course, know better...), that synergistic survivor creed remains a vital methodology throughout these lands.

Characterized by prayers, offerings, shrines, designs, blessings and maledictions, physical prowess, psychic awareness, bright colors, and sudden violence, Voudoun practices reflect their eclectic origins. Whereas elaborate Arts like High Ritual Magick favor wealth and perfection, Voudoun remains eminently *practical*. Sure, certain devotees are rich, especially these days; the practice itself, however, employs whatever resources a person has to work with. Faith and trust outweigh arcane rituals and ostentatious displays. Loyalty means more than titles or gold. Rewards and punishments come swiftly... often with quirks of sardonic humor attached... and newcomers get tested with fierce irony and ominous threats. In many regards, the intentionally eerie nature of Voudoun presents a giant *KEEP OUT* sign to outsiders... most especially white ones. For obvious reasons, a practitioner wears many masks and keeps many secrets.

Beyond those masks and secrets, our Voudoun practitioner nurtures passionate connection. Priestesses become "Mama," and priests become "Papa." Far from being distant, sublime godheads, his Loa patrons are powerful yet accessible cousins whose touch is a prayer or offering away. Anyone who needs a favor can come asking for it... and although the price of that favor might not be as pleasant or easy as he might have wished, it *does* tend to be granted in one form or another...

Despite its shared roots with faith, shamanism and witchcraft, Voudoun has a distinct culture whose methods and doctrines don't always play well with others. The Loa and related spirits certainly manifest through their human devotees, but those relationships are more familial than the ones often shared (and endured) between shamans and their spirit allies. That element of family is an essential, and typically neglected, element of the Voudoun mage's Arts. Given that the practice originated with family-oriented people who were severed from everything and everyone they'd known before, it's not surprising that blood – figurative and otherwise – holds such a vital place in Voudoun lore and practice.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion

Associated Abilities: Art, Athletics, Awareness, Belief Systems, Carousing, Crafts, Empathy, Intimidation, Lucid Dreaming, Medicine, Meditation, Streetwise

Common Instruments: Artwork (vévés), blessings and curses, blood, bones and remains, cards and dice, cups and vessels, crossroads, dance and movement, drugs and poisons, elements, eye contact, fashion, group rites, herbs, household tools, knots and rope, languages, meditation, music, offerings and sacrifices, prayers and invocations, sex and sensuality, symbols, True Names, voice, wands and staves, weapons, writing

Weird Science

Folks who think that "science is boring" know nothing *about* science. Underneath the lab coats and brain-cracking equations run currents of curious wonder. And though cold-eyed Technocrats favor a controlled approach to the Scientific Arts, certain visionaries refuse to be so confined. Would you call them mad? Perhaps... but their dedication keeps the hope of Science alive!

Unlike most other technomagickal Arts, weird science isn't based upon repeatable results. Oh, sure, the mad scientist *wants* to be able to craft armies of robotic servitors or fleets of dirigible warships... and he may well be able to create them too, once a favorable prototype has emerged from his laboratory. However, that Inspired Scientist (don't call him a "mage" – that's ridiculous!) is more engaged by the spirit of inquiry and potential than by the devotion to repeatable craftsmanship. As a consequence, his creations often feature glaring flaws and Paradoxes that will be smoothed out, of course, in later iterations... if he ever gets around to making them, that is.

Weird science, by definition, defies the bounds of possibility. Its crazy ideas fuel crazy creativity. Theories that no rational scientist would entertain guide the creation of devices and creatures whose very existence violates the Consensus: jetpacks, death rays, quirky robots, outlandish vehicles, Atlantean sonic technologies, spacecraft, mechanical appendages, psychic enhancement gear, lab-grown allies, devastating war machines, and whatever other strange gadgetry a mad scientist can imagine. And yet, this isn't some sort of "magic" – heavens, no! Every piece of odd technology depends upon theories so unconventional yet sublime that they *MUST* be true, if only for the sake of an imaginative universe.

As with other tech-based practices, weird science requires serious work in the lab before working results appear. An Enlightened Scientist might spend months or years honing his creation before revealing it to the world. Yet once that innovation has been achieved, he can often replicate it quickly, often with the help of skilled (if dispirited) minions. Weird science also allows the Scientist to alter tech with sudden bursts of inspiration, MacGyvering rickety inventions that last just long enough to accomplish a single task. And so – because he's no sort of *wizard*, you imbecile! – the mad scientist needs tools and materials close at hand in order to work his wonders. True Science is indeed miraculous, but it's not some kind of magic. No, not at all...

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; Bring Back the Golden Age; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Data; It's All Good – Have Faith; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Academics, Crafts, Esoterica (various so-called disproven scientific theories), Energy Weapons, Hypertech, Research, Science, Technology

Common Instruments: Armor, books, bones and remains, brain/computer interface, celestial alignments, computers and IT gear, devices and machines, elements, gadgets, inventions, laboratories, languages, numbers and numerology, toys, vehicles, weapons, writing and inscriptions

Witchcraft

Witch. One of the more venomous words in the English language, the label "witch" can send a person to a hideous death. Even now, when the Burning Times seem more like myth than history, the popular imagination equates witches with warty evil hags cackling over poisonous, foul-smelling brews. Why would anyone, then, want to use something as quaintly horrific as "witchcraft"? Because those who understand it know that it *works*... not only as a magickal practice but also as a form of reverence for the natural world.

The equally loaded term "witchcraft" covers a lot of ground, from the diabolical maledictions of medieval legend to the reclamationist neopaganism of the modern era. As a **Mage** practice, however, the term refers to a nature-oriented, practical craft, as opposed to the scholastic abstractions of High Ritual Magick, alchemy, and so on. Traditional witchcraft is a folk-oriented low magick practiced by common people who need discernible results: healing, fertility, divination, luck or misfortune, prosperity, clarity, physical prowess, and intercessions between the people and their gods that are far more intimate than what can be found at the local temple. The disputed origin of the term *witch* is "wisdom," although other possibilities include words meaning "twist," "knot," or "knowledge." And so, witches throughout time have been said to know things... often things that proper people could not or should not know.

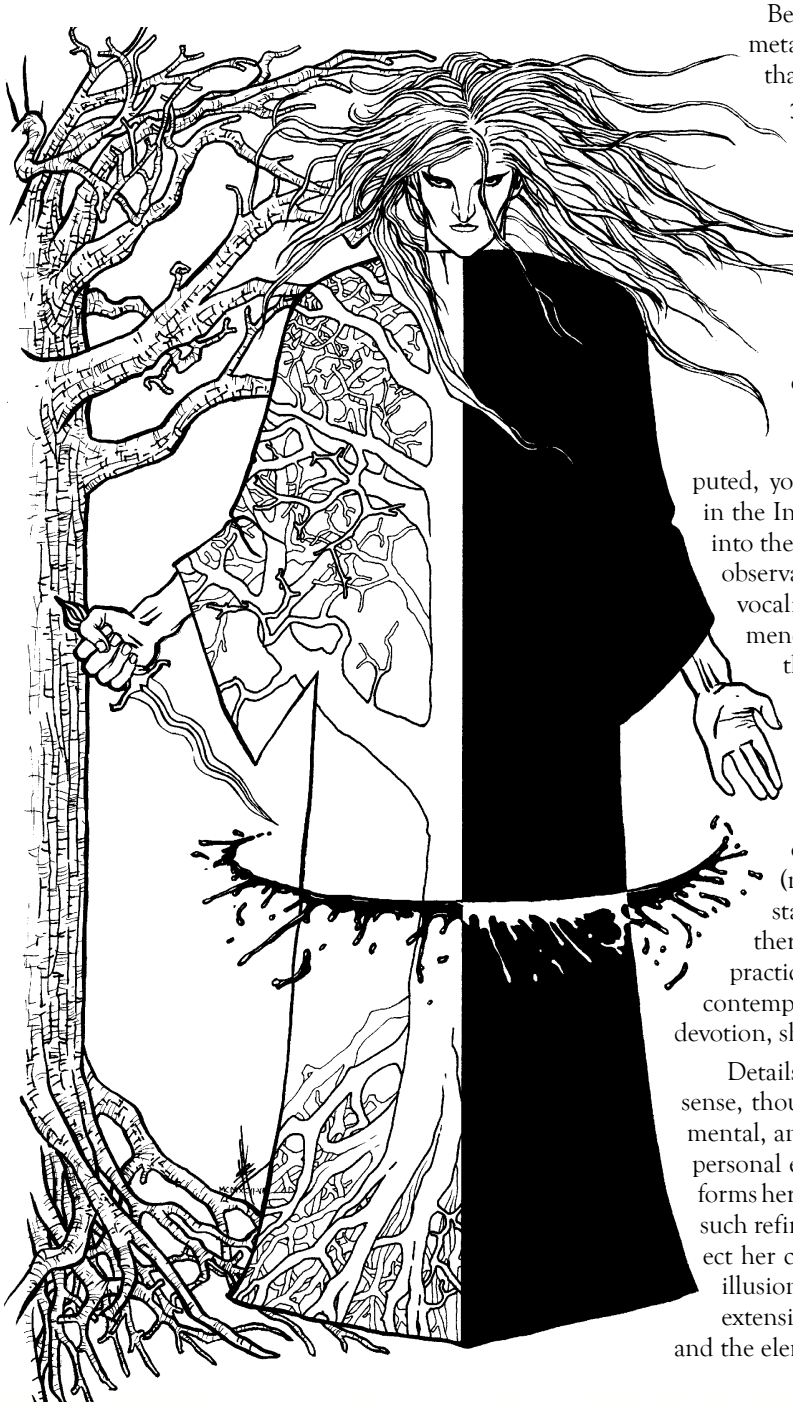
Today's witchcraft features a postmodernist brew of traditional European wise-craft; 19th-century literary occultism and 20-century mystic fusions; pre-Christian elements from Greek, Norse, Celtic, Hindu, Slavic, Roman, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cultures (with prodigious cultural appropriations from Native American, African, Romani, and occasionally Asian cultures); repurposed Christian and Jewish practices (especially Catholicism and the Kabbalah); postmodernist philosophy, and New Age takes on quantum physics; mass-media iconography; and tons of pure invention wrapped up in a bright bow of fantasy media, political activism, and technological polyculture. This high-eclectic synergy often incorporates computers, the Internet, pop psychology, chaos theory, and other elements that would be entirely unrecognizable to old-school wise-crafters. Nevertheless, it speaks to people on an elemental level... and yes, as a mystic practice, it's as effective as any other tool on a mage's workbench.

In all its forms, witchcraft has an outlaw mystique – due both to constant persecution and a defiantly sinister stance. Today's witch might practice holistic medicine and nonviolent politics, but she still exists outside of mainstream respectability... often with a *Fuck You* attitude. Whatever style of witchcraft she prefers, that Art/ Craft incorporates potent symbols – Old Gods, nature spirits, blades, circles, wands, robes, very dark or bright colors, occult iconography, seasons, shadows, chalices, ashes, the four Classical elements, and so on – that reach into the subconscious territory beyond a mainstream comfort zone.

Our 21st-century witch might favor dark clothes, body art, and a swaggering subculture image, or cloak her Arts in a middle-class façade that conceals her elemental devotions. She could follow a strict Witch's Rule or proclaim herself a mystic anarchist. In more or less all cases, she reveres Nature

and diversity, channeling her Will through harmony with light and shadow, death and life. Though epitomized by the Verbena Tradition, she isn't necessarily Pagan and doesn't always wear her Art on her sleeve, so to speak. Regardless of her tools or devotions, though, her witchcraft remains eminently *practical*, focused on everyday miracles and visionary craft.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything is Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith; Might is Right; One-Way Trip to Oblivion



Associated Abilities: Academics, Animal Kinship, Art, Awareness, Crafts, Medicine, Meditation, Occult, Pharmacopeia

Common Instruments: Artwork, blessings and curses, blood and fluids, bodywork, bones and remains, books, brews, cards, celestial alignments, circles, crossroads, cups and vessels, dance, drugs and poisons, elements, eye contact, group rites, household tools, knots and ropes, music, offerings, sex and sensuality, social domination, symbols, True Names, wands and staves, weapons, writing and inscriptions

Yoga

Beneath the popular exercise trend rests a potent metaphysical practice. Named from a Sanskrit word that means *union*, *balance*, *joining*, and (by extension) *yoke*, yoga employs mental, physical, and spiritual disciplines to refine a higher state of being. Through advanced levels of yoga, a practitioner unlocks the greatest human abilities, eventually transcending his human limits and achieving enlightenment... first temporary, and then perpetual. Dedication to yoga strips away the illusions of physical existence. In communion with Absolute Reality, the True Self – the center of consciousness (*Atman* or *Purusha*) – comes to comprehend the Unity of All.

Although its historical origins may be disputed, yoga derives from a collection of practices rooted in the Indus-Sarasvati cultures of ancient India. Collected into the *Vedas* – books of knowledge – these practices and observations refined several forms of ritual, meditation, vocalization, and physical exercise, all dedicated to mending the fractured state of human existence. In the Classical Yoga period, those practices mingled with the *Upanishads*: scriptures of dynamic unity. By 1900, Western occult traditions had begun to incorporate yogic disciplines into their own practices. (The Council of Nine, of course, understood such practices long ago.) Through mastery of those disciplines, an experienced *yogi* or *yogini* (male or female practitioner) can see the essential state of Reality... and can work with it as well. Yoga, therefore, isn't simply a state of meditation but also a practice of conscious activity. The practitioner doesn't just contemplate her navel; with deep awareness and conscious devotion, she commits herself to *action*.

Details about yoga could fill their own book. In a practical sense, though, a yoga practitioner pursues intense physical, mental, and spiritual study; combines learned wisdom with personal epiphanies; supersedes old limitations; and transforms herself into an instrument of transcendence. Through such refinement, she can attain superhuman abilities, project her consciousness outside of her body, and reveal the illusions of material reality as tricks of the mind... and, by extension, master earthly forces like gravity, time, matter, and the elements – in game terms, all of the Nine Spheres.

(A related tradition of practices that often incorporate yogic disciplines is known collectively as *Tantra*: "weaving," "loom," "activity," or "essence." Although many devotees of one still practice the other, however, yoga and Tantra are not the same things. Both share a heritage, a dedication to transcendence of physical and mental limitations, and a view of the Whole beyond the illusions of separation. Generally, though, yoga unifies apparently separate elements into a conscious, transcendent whole, whereas Tantra accesses transcendent energies through sublimating physical reality. For obvious reasons, various mages incorporate elements of both traditions into their practices. For an example, see Lee Ann's activities in the **Prelude**.)

Often described as "the science of body, breath, mind, soul, and universe," yoga can be considered a metaphysical technology. If nothing else, the physical and mental disciplines involved in yoga have proven benefits to the human organism. Thus, technomancers and even Technocrats can pursue a yoga practice, although its more esoteric levels defy pure materialism. By the early 21st century, the Technocracy has accepted the useful elements of yoga and incorporated certain aspects of yoga into its training programs. (Again, see John Courage's remarks in the **Prelude**.) And so, although you won't see Black Suits defying gravity and throwing bolts of pure Kundalini energy because of their mastery of yoga, the techniques of breathing, strength, and flexibility influence the new-millennium Technocrat's pursuit of Life, Mind, and Prime Procedures. For traditional mystics (like Chakravanti and Sahajiya), such use of yogic discipline is anathema; for the devotees of Westernized yoga, however, that acceptance provides the punch line for a wondrous joke at the Technocracy's expense.

Despite the utility of books, scriptures, designs, and various medical and sometimes psychoactive concoctions, yoga is a largely self-contained practice. The physical body becomes a vessel for the transcendent Self. A devotee tends toward extraordinary good health and vitality, incisive perceptions, and a big-picture perspective on things. She might be capable of apparently impossible physical feats of endurance and flexibility, and she can – at advanced levels – sidestep little things like physics. The foundation of her practice, however, involves correct breathing, centered consciousness, and reaching past apparent limitations. As the guru Bikram advised his students: *This is going to hurt. Don't be afraid.*

Associated Paradigms: A Mechanistic Cosmos; A World of Gods and Monsters; Bring Back the Golden Age; Creation's Divine and Alive; Divine Order and Earthly Chaos; Everything's an Illusion, Prison, or Mistake; It's All Good – Have Faith; Might is Right; Tech Holds All Answers

Associated Abilities: Athletics, Awareness, Enigmas, Esoterica, Expression, Medicine, Meditation, Survival

Common Instruments: Bodywork, circles and designs, dances and movement, energy, languages (Sanskrit), meditation, music, ordeals, prayers, sex and sensuality, symbols, thought forms, voice (mantras, the Om), writings and inscriptions

Instruments: The Tools of Focus

Belief *envisions*, practice *inspires*, and tools *perform*. All three elements allow a mage to focus Will and knowledge into Effects. And although any human activity can provide a tool for an imaginative mage – *so long as that instrument fits the mage's beliefs and practices* – certain tools hold honored and popular places in magickal practices of all kinds.

As suggested by its root word *instruere* ("to prepare"), an instrument is a tool or set of tools that prepares an act of magick or hypertech. That instrument doesn't have to be a physical object – it could be a dance, a song, a prayer or invocation, an intense glance, a scent, a formula, a gesture or word or handful of ash. The potential variations among such tools are more or less infinite. If an object or activity can be used to capture an intention and bring it into being, then that object or activity can be used as an instrument.

Symbolic Power of the Instruments

Many tools carry symbolic weight, granting them significance beyond their practical utilities. Sure, a sword can kill you, but the *mystique* of certain swords can cut deeper than the blade itself. There's a huge symbolic difference between a katana and a butcher's knife, and that difference often influences a person's choice of instruments. In game terms, such tools tug at Mythic Threads, adding their symbolic presence to the raw Will-power of the mage.

By extension of that symbolism, certain instruments define certain groups: Etherites have their goggles; witches have their wands; agents of authority have their dark suits and mirrorshades, and all those trappings create a sense of group identity. For many people, this sense of identity bonds them to the group. Symbolic instruments, then, can be like gang colors, offering a shout-out to your sect of choice.

Tools and Time

As mentioned elsewhere throughout this chapter, instruments demand time and effort... and certain tools demand more time and/ or effort than others. A person who dances to focus his intentions can't cast a spell in a three-second turn; one who employs intense rituals may need an hour or longer, and an artisan-magus could prepare his Effects for days or weeks before the magick manifests. That's why so many practices depend upon creating ***Wonders*** (as per the Background of that name) or else employ quick-use tools: amulets, guns, enchanted blades, and the like. It takes time and effort to focus Will into magick. If you rush the process, things go poorly... resulting in Paradox, fast-casting modifiers, and other obstacles.

In game terms, then, your mage might need several turns in order to cast his Effect, with the amount of time based upon the tools in question. For that reason, your mage might want a wide selection of instruments to choose from. Maybe he doesn't have time to perform an elaborate hoop-dance right now... but that pouch of tobacco will serve as a quick offering for his totem spirit until he's got the time to set things right.

Remember, too, that mages don't choose their tools based on convenience, but rather upon *what they believe they need to do in order to alter reality*. A mad scientist toils in her laboratory to create a portable transmutation ray, then carries that ray around with her, aims it, and turns it on before the Effect starts changing things. It would be more convenient, in game terms, for her to simply glare at an enemy and turn him into a newt. Even if she has Life 5 on her character sheet, however, she wouldn't do things that way *because she's a scientist, not a witch*. Sure, she probably accepts that witches have power; that *kind* of power isn't her style, though... and thus, it does not work for her.

Eventually, certain mages learn to *BE* the focus rather than to *NEED* the focus. And at that point, they're able to discard tools, as described earlier in this section. Still, as we explained in the sidebar about the one-inch punch, you can't ditch your instruments just because you think it's possible to do so. Magick is an extension of the mage, and tools direct that mage's beliefs and bring his magick into being.

Standard Instruments

Despite the march of science, certain symbols have become so deeply ingrained in the Consensus that they could be called *standard instruments*. Such tools provide the default focus for mystic or hypertech training and practices. The ***Common Practices*** listed in the group entries in **Chapter Five** represent the practices and instruments that members of those groups employ. The various factions and mentors teach their students with such tools, and most mages use them for a lifetime.

In game terms, a standard tool offers no bonus or penalty. You might incur a penalty if you work without one, or receive a bonus if you use one in an especially significant manner (see p. 588). For the most part, though, these instruments simply provide the appropriate toolkit for a mage's practice.

Personalized Instruments

Certain mages employ personalized or unique tools – a lucky baseball, rowan wand, hand-built guitar, and so forth. Such *personalized instruments* resonate with the mage who employs them. There is, perhaps, a touch of Resonance between such symbols and an individual character. In game terms, a personal tool reflects that character's connection to a Sphere – a bridge between artist and Art.

For your character's ***affinity Sphere*** (as described in **Chapter Six**), choose one personal focus that fits his practice and that Sphere. A Progenitor Genegineer might connect to Life through a mutagenic cocktail of chemicals, whereas a Bata'a houngan unites himself with that same Sphere through a gift of whiskey, three cigars, and a virgin rooster for Baron Samedi. The personal tool represents your mage's original training and connection with the Sphere in question. In return for sticking close to your roots, you can reduce by -1 the difficulty of a roll that employs that Sphere. After all, that instrument *is* significant to your mage, so he employs it as if it were a significant tool.

Optional Rule: Significant Instruments

Earlier in this chapter, ***Step Two*** describes ***Pulling Mythic Threads*** – that is, manipulating symbols with powerful significance. As an *optional rule*, an especially significant instrument – ornate Tarot cards, a Latin prayer – tugs on the fibers of the Tapestry. In game terms, such an instrument could reduce the Arete roll difficulty by -1 *or* might make an otherwise vulgar Effect coincidental under the proper circumstances. After all, many people – Sleeper and otherwise – invest belief into things like Tarot cards or prayers and will readily accept a miracle that follows seven Hail Marys and a heartfelt genuflection.

The same tool, however, *cannot be used for both purposes;* either it reduces the difficulty or else it makes something that would normally be considered vulgar into something that could be considered coincidental.

Significant instruments must be used in significant ways. In game terms, your mage needs to impress the power of that symbol upon her audience. A mere Tarot reading doesn't really count as a significant focus – the cards alone are *standard instruments* for occult practices (see previous page). In order to receive the -1 difficulty bonus, both the player and the character need to work the Mythic Threads attached to the instrument in question. A prayer should be spoken with great faith and clarity among the faithful; a gun must be large, scary, and presented with a memorable soliloquy. (Quoting Dirty Harry, though, would probably spoil the Effect.) An ordeal would have to be impressively vicious, a dance impressively performed, a curse impressively vile, in order to count as a significant focus for your Will and the Consensus' belief.

As for rendering vulgar Effects into coincidental ones, *the instrument MUST still provide a believable rationale under the local belief system.* A glowing magic wand at a Harry Potter film festival would be acceptable as some weird special effect, but if that wand starts firing lightning bolts or levitating cars, then all bets are off. Miraculous healing thanks to some holy water and a really great prayer? Possible. Making a tank vanish in the middle of a fight? No tool can make *that* feat seem possible, although an impressive tech-based weapon could certainly blow one up without violating the modern paradigm.

Unique Instruments

In the place closest to a mage's heart, you might find a *unique instrument*. This tool really is one of a kind, and if the mage loses it, he also loses a vital connection to his Arts. Unlike other kinds of tools, a unique instrument *must* be something your mage can lose: a fiddle crafted by your dead grandfather, a locket with your mentor's last portrait, a shirt given to you by a now-lost lover, and so forth.

Game-wise, a unique instrument reduces the difficulty of your Arete roll by -1 when you work with a particular Sphere. That Sphere is tied to the instrument in question; if your magick fiddle, for instance, is attuned to the Time Sphere, then only Effects that use the Time Sphere will benefit from that bonus.

If that tool is both personal *and* unique (or significant and unique), then it reduces the difficulty by -2. *Only* your mage can use that instrument in such a way. That fiddle might sound great, but it truly sings in your mage's hands alone.

If your character loses that unique instrument or finds herself working without it, then she's essentially ***Working Without Focus***, as described on (pp. 566-567). If it gets destroyed, then the bonus is gone for good. From that point onward, she's working without focus until she can transcend the need for at least one tool by raising her Arete by one more dot.

Common Instruments

When picking out the instruments that suit your mage, check out the following entries. People, after all, do not select their most important tools without good reasons for using them. Most instruments have symbolic and cultural significance as well as practical applications. Once you start to recognize such factors, you realize how deep a mage's toolkit really goes...

Common instruments include:

Armor: Protective devices can shield a mage and her allies from harm. Such instruments range from self-powered exo-suits and enchanted plate armor, hypertech fabrics, or specially reinforced clothing, to the bulletproof "ghost shirts" or woad body-paint designs intended to protect warriors in battle.

As a tool for Awakened focus, the armor in question must be created or modified by the Spheres to provide additional levels of protection. One point of Quintessence, invested into the armor with Prime 2 or better, can make that armor resistant to aggravated damage. For details about armor, see the ***Combat*** section in **Chapter Nine**.

Artwork: Drawings, paintings, CGI, sculptures, graffiti, and so forth allow a mage to capture his intentions in a visual medium. One of the oldest mystic tools (as shown in prehistoric cave-paintings and goddess figurines), artwork often draws upon the principle of connection: by depicting your subject, you attach your intentions and desires to it through the art. Artwork also influences the human condition by appealing to people (or disturbing them) when they recognize the symbolic energy of a piece.

Blessings and Curses: Bestowing favor or inflicting bad luck – especially through the power of gods or spirits – remains a potent form of magick. And so, when people see witches, clergy, gamblers, and hoodoo-folk call upon God, Fate, and Fortune, they're inclined to believe in the results. In game terms, blessings and curses tend to be coincidental. After all, superstition and religious awe are universal, even in these supposedly civilized times.

Blood and Other Fluids: Sweat, tears, blood, semen, saliva, pus, urine, bile, marrow, sap... through such fluids flow the essence of life. Sure, they seem disgusting to most folks, but mages – especially ones who practice medicine work, biotech, or primal magick – recognize their power. DNA, viruses, life

force, the generative capacities of living things – all manifest in such organic fluids, so many practices employ those liquid instruments... possibly distilling them down to Quintessential Tass, painting with them, drinking them, drawing them out of the body, releasing them in acts of gory sacrifice, or otherwise opening an organic vessel and letting the magick flow. (See also ***Brews***, ***Food***, ***Offerings,*** and ***Sex***.)

Bodywork: Massage, energy-sharing, chiropractic medicine, acupuncture and acupressure, yoga, and other disciplines of body manipulation allow a person to influence mental and physical health, stimulate organic functions, establish or reinforce intimate bonds between the practitioner and his subject, and simply help people feel better about themselves. As a result, bodywork forms a centerpiece for several mystic practices, especially ones that – like martial arts, shamanism, witchcraft, yoga, and certain types of medicine work – favor vitality over external tools.

Bones, Skins, Organs, and Other Remains: Like bodily fluids, the physical pieces of a living (or *once*-living) thing contain potent magickal significance. After all, such remains facilitate life, and so they also focus the life of a spell. As a result, they often get converted into ritual instruments of many different kinds. Books might be written on flayed skin; dusts can be ground from powdered bone; items could be crafted out of organs or skeletal remains. It's gruesome, sure – but it's also *quite* traditional. Creepy mystics aren't the only folks who do this sort of thing, either... *are* they, Dr. Frankenstein? The literal structures of life play important roles in magick, science, and religion, no matter how macabre that role might seem.

Books, Scrolls, and Periodicals: Is print obsolete? Not even close. Although e-books and PDFs comprise a wider range of texts now than they did even a decade ago, the printed word retains a mystic significance that those digital media have yet to achieve.

In older days, books were like magickal items: rare, expensive, exclusive to a certain class of people (those who could read), and able to transmit arcane lore through an apparently supernatural method. Mages, then, were an elite class simply because so many of them had, and could employ, books. Since the advent of mass publication in the late 1700s and mass literacy in the 1800s, most of the glamour has faded. And yet, when people seek deeper truths and fictions, they still turn to da Vinci codes, boy wizards. and Middle Earth. Even the rougher voices on the socio-political fringe publish books in order to seem more respectable. Talk is cheap; writing is respected.

21st-century mage periodicals range from e-books of shadows to SF/ fantasy lit, computer manuals, magazines and e-zines, occult tomes, aged grimoires, ancient scrolls, downloadable PDFs, print-on-demand texts, graphic novels, and even game books like this one. Many feature the occult lore of ages, whereas others present pop philosophy, subversive concepts, historical information, cataloged facts, and any other subject that can be presented in written form. Within the last 30 years, incredibly rare arcane texts have popped up on big-box bookstore shelves all around the world, so any mage who takes herself seriously has a library of some kind. (See the ***Library*** Background in **Chapter Six** for more details.)

Brain/ Computer Interface: An emerging technology among the Masses, BCI is a common tool among certain Awakened factions, especially the Virtual Adepts, Iteration X, the Syndicate, and the NWO. Microtechnology – usually a bush of carbon nanotube bundles spread throughout the brain – transmits electrical signals from the brain, interprets them through a computerized interface, and allows for physical manipulations or virtual functions through brain power alone.

Enlightened BCI lets the user tap into computerized systems through mere thoughts, manipulate cybernetic gear, access wireless Internet networks, and record or transmit impressions into or out of the brain. Essentially a technological synthesis of telekinesis and telepathy, BCI requires specialized equipment and training to employ. Electrical surges can damage or even destroy it; neurotoxins disrupt its functions; and radio transmissions can hack into the interface, cause it to go haywire, or override the primary user's commands. As an instrument, it's invisible to the human eye but discernible to electronic monitoring gear. And although it allows for a hands-free approach, its limitations become pretty obvious when the user tries to employ it in areas without advanced tech, regions with tech-hostile realities, or places without net access.

Because it literally messes with your brain, many mages consider BCI anathema. Even among allies, the debate about such technologies can get pretty heated. Does BCI turn its user into a tech-addled posthuman, or is it simply another step in human progress, like language, printing, or the Internet? Regardless of such objections, brain/ computer interface is a viable tool for the 21st-century technomancer – borderline coincidental so long as it's used invisibly, and potentially game-changing for the future of humanity.

Brews, Potions, Powders, and Other Concoctions: Blending various ingredients into potent concoctions, the archetypal witch's brew and its many permutations – goofer dust, corpse-powder, dragon's blood, beer, wine, love philters, mystic potions, and the diverse medicines, foods, and beverages found across the world – present an obvious tool of magickal intent. Regardless of the purposes or composition involved in a given concoction, the process of turning many things into one thing reflects a sort of magic. For that reason, mythology often credits gods and wise-folk with the creation of beers, foods, and medicines. In game terms, any sort of mage can use such refreshments. Holy water, love potions, hypermeds – they're all refinements of the same basic idea: *mix it up, drink it down, and watch things change!*

Cards, Dice, and Other Instruments of Chance: Probability holds a sense of wonder, even for the Masters of Entropy whose Arts direct it, to a certain degree. The fickle hand of chance represents the randomness principles of the universe, so its talismans – dice, tokens, thrown bones, drawn straws, divination sticks, and, of course, the symbol-flashing cards – reflect command of destiny. Fate appears to speak through these instruments, and they become potent tools of omen and prophecy.

Traditionally, a caster mixes up the tokens into an apparently random selection, then draws a certain number of them in order to find out what he needs to know. That mage could cheat, of course, removing the random element from the task. Still, instruments of chance present a dramatic focus for intentions – witness the gambling-hall scenes in *Run Lola Run* or *Casino Royale* – especially when big things depend upon the turn of a friendly card.

Cards, given their visual focus, are especially vivid instruments – particularly the symbolic portents of Tarot or other oracular cards. Even normal playing cards, though, can be incredibly evocative, reflecting cosmic tales of sex, violence, desire, and royalty in a few simple icons that find their way into popular mythology.

Celestial Alignments: What's *your* sign? Long before books or machines became common tools, mages read, focused, and calculated the schedules for their rituals by the dance of planets and stars. Even now, when modern science has supposedly disproved the old cosmologies – at least on the mortal side of the Gauntlet – the old mystique of horoscopes, the brilliant possibilities of Hubble telescope photos, and the eldritch mysteries of deep space continue to influence mystic and scientific practices, conjuring insights and miracles when the stars are right.

Circles, Pentacles, and Other Geometric Designs: As the archetypal symbol of unity, the circle shows up in mystic practices everywhere. Enclosing workspaces, sigils, ritual areas, and other regions in circles, spell casters secure that space within spheres of their intentions. Meanwhile, other circular designs – rings, belts, linked hands, dancing circles, even circular movements and sung rounds – provide similar enclosures that seal an intention with an activity.

Other geometric shapes – triangles, squares, hexagrams, pentacles, and so forth – seal different sorts of activities. Symbolically, those shapes (which appear in scientific formulae too) represent cosmic principles by mathematical designs. Squares reflect stability, rectangles present expansive yet secure areas, crosses signify intersecting forces, triangles direct energy, and combinations of those designs – as seen in yantras, mandalas, sand paintings, and other ritual diagrams – combine several forces into unified wholes... wholes often surrounded by a circle.

Certain ritual practices, especially in High Ritual Magick, demand elaborate designs that must be traced and crafted to exacting standards. Such designs can take hours or even days to create, and they often become permanent parts of a ritual space. In symbolic architecture, the space itself might be crafted into the design – a common practice among Freemasons and other artists of sacred geometry. Temples, cathedrals, Chantries, and other important buildings become massive works of symbolism... which, when you think about it, says volumes about the mystic dimensions of Washington DC. (See also ***Artwork*** and ***Formulae***.)

Computers and IT Gear: *The* essential tech of the 21st century, computers and other elements of Information Technology form the basis for Consensus Reality in our age. For obvious reasons, then, mages use computers for everything from data storage to social transformation. Not long ago, such machines were toys for a privileged few. Now, almost everyone within the industrialized world has at least *access* to a computer, and many folks use them on a daily basis.

Magickally speaking, computers store and manipulate data like handy household gods. Using arcane calculations and alchemical technologies, they transform every sphere of life they touch. The industrial world depends upon computers nowadays – they run cars, manage banks, link people, and allow for a global community that, within living memory, used to be impossible. These portals of Hermes let tech-savvy mages sidestep physical reality, not only through the Digital Web itself but through common miracles like smart phones, laptops, and streaming media. And so, in our new millennium, a mage can use a computer for damn near anything if she's good enough at what she does.

Connected to the computers themselves, the ever-growing network of clouds, sites, sectors, and connections holds an expanding universe of virtual potential. And though the gleeful prognostications of early cyber-visionaries bear little resemblance to the Internet we know today, that technology is just a few decades old. What might happen when and if the Masses catch up to the Awakened in terms of Internet Enlightenment? That potential, and its practical applications, still seem very much like magic.

For game rules dealing with computer technologies, see **The Book of Secrets**.

Crossroads and Crossing-Days: Intersections are powerful. Areas and times in which one element or energy crosses over another one, or even several, herald passages, transitions, and transformations. Clearly, such transitions are magickal – liminal spaces where options and choices multiply. As a result, crossroads and transitional periods – midnight, dawn, New Year's Eve, certain holidays – provide focus for mystic workings. Rituals often seem most significant when performed in such places or times.

Cups, Chalices, Cauldrons, and Other Vessels: Practically and symbolically, the many vessels we create to hold and carry things – especially water, the liquid upon which human life depends – hold potent significance for both mystic and scientific practices. Cups, goblets, chalices, and cauldrons have deep associations with birth and renewal, feminine energy and fluid potential. For examples, look no further than the Holy Grail, the witch's cauldron, Baba Yaga's pot, or the singing bowls of Tibet. On the technical end, vats, beakers, crèches, and test tubes contain their own mystique... witness the phrase "test-tube baby" or the image of vat-brewed clones. And so, mages of many kinds use vials, bottles, pots, and beakers to work their Arts, often combining those instruments with brews, water, and various concoctions in order to turn one thing into another.

Dances, Gestures, Postures, and Other Movement Practices: Movement unites the body, mind, and life force into a flowing whole that breaks physical stasis and opens

vital energies. Dance – often driven by ***Music*** (see below) – sends the body into ecstatic flight. Postures and katas – specifically those taught in yoga, t'ai chi, and various martial practices – program muscle memory into efficient poses while freeing the mind to pursue focus or meditation. Gestures – arm waves, hand signs, mudras, genuflections, and so forth – direct manual dexterity into symbolic displays, as peaceful as the "fear not" mudra or as incendiary as Hitler's salute. From bowing to ballet, such activities convey deep ritual significance through physical discipline. In especially rigorous forms – advanced yoga, breakdancing, classical ballet, and so forth – those disciplines demand physical vitality and constant practice, channeled through cultural symbolism, aesthetic appeal, and just plain *fun*. And so, the various styles of dance, gesture, and movement form essential elements of mystic and technological practices, directing a person's intentions and energies through the instrument of the body itself.

Devices and Machines: Humanity's great gift is our use of tools. It's clear, then, that such tools – from simple machines like bows and arrows to complex machines like death rays or printing presses – hold symbolic power beyond their practical utility. Humanity's machines *are* a form of magick, epitomizing the Will to transcend our limits and transform our world. Technomancers are literally defined by their reliance upon machines, but even the most traditional shaman can use a loom as a creative instrument, directing his intentions through whirring shuttles, levers, and gears.

For more details about the uses of technology, see **Chapter Nine**'s section ***The Technological World***.

Drugs and Poisons: Like the ***Brews and Concoctions*** described above, various drugs, poisons, venoms, and so forth change one state of being into another. In the case of psychoactive drugs, that state might involve radically altered consciousness. Practices from primal shamanism to psychedelic transhumanism use mind-altering drugs to cleanse the doors of perception and open a mage to new possibilities. Poisons, meanwhile, harm or kill inconvenient people – a nasty but traditional practice among alchemists, witches, and assassins. Such substances make excellent tools for Entropy, Life, and Mind Effects and range from natural toxins to hypertech drugs.

Chapter Nine's section ***Drugs, Poison, and Disease*** features in-depth rules for the effects of toxins in your game.

Elements: Fire, water, earth, and air – perhaps adding metal, wood, glass, plastic, and electricity, depending on your point of view – all play important roles in almost every sort of practice. From their symbolic meanings (solid as stone, fiery passions, earthy groundedness, etc.) to their practical applications through Forces, Matter, and (for plants) Life Arts, the elements can become a mage's primary instruments.

Depending on her practice, your mage might employ elements through spiritual connection, scientific physics, angelic and demonic control, sympathetic magick, or even a personal tie to the living world. Through her Arts, that character can shape, conjure, alter, manipulate, merge into, or otherwise control the forces that make up our world... a literally elemental talent that in many ways defines the Art of Wizardry.

Energy: The life force forms a significant element of mystic focus. Through practices like Tantra, yoga, and other forms of energy work, a person can perceive and manipulate that life force, directing it to his needs. That energy, in turn, fuels martial arts, sexual disciplines, bodywork, and other practices.

For mages with the Prime Sphere, this instrument focuses Quintessence-based magick. However, characters *without* the Prime Sphere can also focus energy as an instrument, so long as that person's practice includes energy work as a possibility. For more details about working with energy, see the ***Prime*** and ***Primal Utility Spheres***. For related instruments, see ***Bodywork***, ***Dance***, ***Eye Contact***, ***Group Rites***, ***Meditation***, ***Music***, ***Ordeals***, ***Sex***, and ***Social Domination***.

Eye Contact: By using these windows to the soul, a mage can charm, frighten, seduce, bewitch, curse, intimidate, or otherwise enchant someone else. Folks have feared the Evil Eye for centuries and cultivated an extensive body of lore – banishment gestures, hex signs, spitting on the ground, and so forth – in order to escape its influence. These days, though, people often want you to look them in the eye. And so, flirtatious glances, poisonous glares, dominance-establishing staring contests, puppy-dog eyes, and other optic rituals become potent instruments for magick and technology.

Fashion: Clothes can make the mage. From the social grace of a bespoke suit (that is, one that's tailor-made for the individual) to the fierce warnings of gang gear or the playful flirtations of a pretty dress, fashion plays a subtle yet pervasive part in social interactions. Your mage could craft reinforced clothing into armor; adopt disguises; don ritual gear (robes, skins, body paint, etc.); display a uniform; cosplay familiar or original characters; or simply use high fashion or street wear to invoke a particular effect. Especially when that clothing holds symbolic weight – like priest's robes, biker jackets, military uniforms, or fetish gear – fashion becomes a potent focus for Mind powers, Spirit rites, and Matter-based protection from a dangerous world.

On that note, the *lack* of clothing – either bared body parts or total nudity – constitutes its own type of fashion. Witches and shamans often go *skyclad* (naked) in their rites, whereas other mystics take oaths to bare or cover certain parts of their bodies. Veils, burqas, scarves, headdresses, bare feet, naked chests, gis, saris, club fashions, turbans, clothes made from certain materials (silk, fur, even meat)... all of them evoke cultural significance, concealing or displaying certain elements of the wearer's body while sending signals about the person underneath.

Food and Drink: Even mages need to eat. And beyond the good taste and practical nutrition involved with food and drink, those meals have symbolic significance as well. Sharing meals means sharing energy – it's an intimate communion even in the age of fast food and store-bought chow. Ritual feasts hold places of honor in every culture: Thanksgiving, Passover, potlatches, and holiday dinners combine spiritual significance, good food, and social bonds. Even alone, however, food and

drink can be important, mingling bodily needs with mystical intent and chemical ingestion.

Formulae, Equations, and Sacred or Advanced Mathematics: Math has been called the universal language of the cosmos. Its esoteric applications can seem as arcane as any wizard's ritual... and many mystic rituals *do*, in fact, feature complex numerology and brain-shaking mathematics. For Technocrats – especially those from Iteration X and the Syndicate – mathematical models help predict future events (in short, focus Time magick), plot out connections (the Correspondence Sphere), determine esoteric chemistry (Life principles), and employ physics in counterintuitive ways (that is, to use Entropy, Forces, Matter, and Prime). Older mystic practices employ sacred numerology, angelic formulae, and the dizzying principles of non-Euclidian geometry. So if it's true that mathematics bind the universe together, then it's easy to understand why math plays such a vital role in so many practices.

Gadgets and Inventions: Nothing beats the personal touch. As mentioned earlier, machines provide a vital edge to mages who want to get things done. Machines created by the mage himself, however, embody a bit of that creator's Enlightenment, manifesting it as a potentially powerful device.

Strictly speaking, a *gadget* is a minor machine that performs a specific function once and then burns out. An *invention* may be any device that's been hand-crafted by the inventor himself; a one-of-a-kind machine, it's probably the experimental prototype for a planned line of similar devices, with all the bugs and quirks that such prototypes display. Unlike the capital-D Devices described later in ***The Toybox***, these creations don't necessarily have innate technomagick built into them. As focus instruments, they provide mechanical vectors for the creator's Enlightened Science.

Because such devices share a personal connection to their inventor, these tools count as *personal* and *unique instruments* (see pp.587-588) when they're being used by the mage who created them. They count as simply unique instruments in the hands of allied characters, and they probably don't work at all for characters who don't share the inventor's view of reality. In game terms, a mage using his own inventions and gadgets reduces his difficulty by -2, his trusted associates reduce it by -1, and strangers find themselves unable to make heads or tails of the device.

Technocrats who enjoy a special relationship with Q Division might wind up with experimental gadgets and inventions – see the ***Secret Weapons*** Background in **Chapter Six**. Etherite allies and other mystic characters could be trusted (or tasked) with a special gadget from a technomancer whose imagination exceeds his courage. Hopefully, that inventor takes the time to explain how the machine's supposed to work; otherwise, the guinea pig might find herself with a lump of worthless junk in her hands just when she needs it most...

Gems, Stones, and Minerals: Diamonds are forever. Gold is good, and jade incarnates Heavenly goodwill. The mystic properties of precious stones, ores, and minerals echo down through legend, slang, and alchemical lore. Mages who know how to tap into these properties employ them in rituals, build them into instruments, wear them as jewelry, and otherwise keep them close at hand. Technology, meanwhile, employs those properties too. Did you think it was an *accident* that gold is so vital to the world's economy or that diamonds find their way into so many industrial machines...?

Group Rites: Smart mages realize that raising power in groups directs the collective will and imagination of that group toward a specific purpose. Circle-dances, music concerts, plays, protests, prayer meetings, and other gatherings provide focus for mystic rites. Technomancers understand the power of groups too – why else would factories and cubicle farms be so damned effective?

Generally, a mage whips her group to an emotional frenzy and then channels their energy into her intended purpose. As that energy reaches a peak, she plays the crowd like an instrument, bringing things to a climax as she casts her Effect. The ***Allies, Assistants, and Cults*** section (p. 532) and the ***Acting in Concert*** section (pp. 542-543) detail the in-game effects of sympathetic crowds; for certain practices, however, the presence of a group is not just helpful but *essential* to success. **(See also the optional-rule sidebar for *Management and Human Resources*, p. 595.)**

Herbs, Roots, Seeds, Flowers, and Plants: Growing things hold power, especially when you want to perform Life-based magick. Plant-based materials can be essential to other instruments like brews, laboratories, and drugs, and they provide the roots, so to speak, for practices like witchcraft, shamanism, and many forms of medicine work. By gathering, drying, curing, eating, grinding, or otherwise employing these botanical substances, a mage can distill the essence of Creation into her Arts.

Beyond its practical properties, each sort of plant holds symbolic importance; in most cases, the different *portions* of a plant have significance as well. Holly sprigs, elderberries, acorns, mandrake roots... even now, popular culture immortalizes ancient plant lore. A creative player can learn about the properties of different plants and herbs, then bring both the practical and symbolic elements of botanical tools to the gaming table.

Household Tools: Especially among the practical Arts, household tools – pitchforks, hammers, nails, brooms, ovens, horseshoes – hold traditional power as magical implements. The same holds true for technological tools, as well... witness the atavistic terror that's invoked by a chainsaw.

Because magick so often depends upon directing energy and intentions toward a goal, household tools have all kinds of uses. Six silver dollars might be hammered into place around your property to keep the cops away; a specially brewed floor wash might cleanse tainted Resonance; a Roomba (with or without a shark-dressed cat) could patrol your Chantry-house. And when the spells are done, those tools serve double duty around the home. A witch, after all, can use her broom to fly to the gathering and then sweep the house clean once she comes home again.

Knots and Ropes: There's a reason the phrase *spellbinding* exists. Long before Velcro, buttons, or carabiners, people had to tie or weave things together. Because the principle of contagion focuses on connecting spells, subjects, and casters by a single strand, knots and ropes (as well as thongs, strings, threads, and so forth) feature heavily in spells. The metaphorical Tapestry and the concept of string-theory physics both draw upon that connection, and so the acts of binding things together, weaving intentions with materials, and undoing knots to release their energy all serve practical as well as symbolic purposes in magick. And once you understand that fact, you see deeper significance in Celtic knotwork, knitting, the arcane arts of rope bondage, and the pervasive imagery of mystic spiders and Pattern Webs.

Laboratories and Lab Gear: Although you can't usually carry a laboratory around with you (although certain portable labs can be stuck inside a vehicle, trailer, or suitcase), such places of labor provide essential instruments for technological, alchemical, and elaborate ritual practices. Generally, a mage employs his laboratory to refine other tools and spells for his practice, then uses the *results* of that lab work as his portable instruments. Still, without that lab, he'd be more or less worthless. You can't grow clones, install cybernetics, or refine base materials into perfection without a good lab.

By extension, lab equipment – beakers, crucibles, centrifuges, generators, analyzers, and other sundry (though expensive) tech that procures results – constitutes an essential array of tools for the practicing scientist or technician. Even old-school mystics use labs occasionally, though they might refer to them as *dungeons*, *workrooms*, *sanctuaries*, and so forth. Within such space, a mage can work through difficult puzzles, experiment with methods, and enjoy a fairly secure space where Consensus interference is a bad memory.

(An established laboratory space makes an obvious ***Sanctum***, as in the Background Trait of that name. See **Chapter Six** for details.)

Languages: Words are a form of magick; after all, they shape abstract thoughts into reality by communicating them to other beings and thus opening their minds to your own. In a communal form, language shares thoughts and – by extension – broadens the potential of reality for everyone concerned. Words, it is said, opened the gulf between animals, spirits, and human beings... and although animals and spirits clearly have their own forms of language, the flexible precision of human words has certainly marked a major step in our development.

But words are bigger than that. According to many legends, the Divine Source (by whatever name you prefer to call it) spoke words in order to bring the universe into being. Certain words and languages echo that divine command and can thus make things happen. Hebrew, Sanskrit, Arabic, Mandarin, and Latin (among others) supposedly capture the essence of godly speech, whereas other languages like Greek, Urdu, and Hopi encompass sublime concepts that elude other human tongues.

Mundane languages can alter reality too, especially when those languages get rearranged, re-contextualized, redefined,

Memes

A playful pun on *gene* and *memor* (Latin for "mindful"), the term meme reflects a "mental gene" of an idea that replicates itself through symbols and beliefs. Memes spread by appealing to wants, needs, aspirations, or fears within a receptive audience. Often paired with visual symbols (especially in the Internet form of meme, which combines an image with an idea), a meme inspires thoughts; thoughts breed activities; activities create change; and that change often spreads the meme. Thus, the concept alters reality to its own benefit.

Most memes come and go quickly; others latch onto a moment in time and circumstances, grow there, and then fade away as the moment passes. Greater memes thrive in mass consciousness, seeding changes that can shift the course of history. "Survival of the fittest" is a meme... one misattributed to Charles Darwin even though it contradicts Darwin's actual ideas. "Give peace a chance" is another meme, and the Golden Rule has survived as a meme for over two thousand years despite the human tendency to do its opposite. Most memes focus on a simple phrase or image ("*Do as thou wilt*") that acts as a hook for a much larger idea (*Understand that Will is the conscious choice behind your actions, and then act in accordance with your chosen Will so that you might bring the world into accord with your ideals*). For obvious reasons, then, many people misinterpret memes, altering them to fit their own way of looking at things. And so, in return, the meme changes as it grows.

Mages use memes all the time; hell, **Mage** *itself* is a meme wrapped in other memes. Mythic Threads and memes complement one another – the symbol conveying the idea, the idea deepening the significance of the symbol. **Mage** characters employ meme-tools and practices to focus meme-ideas that spread memes... and yet they can eventually realize that their memes are prisons that they must transcend in order to meet their ultimate meme of Ascension... a meme about which most of them disagree. On many levels, **Mage** is a game about competing memes, a game that uses memes, undercut by the meme that all memes are intrinsically flawed.

We now return to our regularly scheduled game rules.

And yeah – that phrase involved a meme or two as well.

or otherwise altered in order to change the meaning attached to the words. Hip-hop rapping presents a perfect example of such remixed language, breaking down the expected rhythms, spellings, and context of words in order to invoke an alternative truth. Internet jargon does the same thing, as does legalese. By altering the common tongue, a person (mage or Sleeper) can change the realities it describes, making codes that admit or exclude certain people, seeding new concepts out among the people, or invoking certain states of mind by forcing the audience to accept unusual modes of communication. And then there's the anti-language of unfamiliar babble that still sounds like it means something important. (See the ***Voice*** entry, below.)

Spoken words also have a sonic component that literally resonates throughout the world, changing the landscape in accordance with the speaker's wishes. Words of power – *amen*, *aho*, *ohm*, and the like – convey both their interpreted meaning and the resonant power behind the sound itself. Therefore, language – both spoken and written – forms a vital element of all mystic practices. (Again, see ***Music***, ***Voice,*** and ***Writing***, below.)

Mass Media: As suggested by the name, media becomes a medium through which ideas and impressions spread from an artist to her audience. The bigger the medium, the larger its audience and the further the reach of that idea. Early on, media consisted of a storyteller and the members of her tribe; later, it expanded to sacred ritual theatres. Each new expansion of technology allowed ideas to go further and reach more people. With the advent of mass printing and distribution, followed by sound- and image-recording technology, radio waves, and rapid international travel, media become the dominant tool for shaping the Consensus. *Memes* (see the sidebar) can now spread across the world in seconds. And so, for the 21st-century mage, mass media becomes an essential tool when altering reality.

As a magickal instrument, mass media can take many forms: music concerts or recordings, TV and radio broadcasts, Internet posts, viral videos, roleplaying games, remixes, mashups, bestselling books, theatrical productions, movies of any scale... if they reach a large audience, then they're all mass media. Such media provide excellent venues for coincidental Mind Effects – the audience *wants* to receive a message, and therefore they're already receptive to it. Such messages can occasionally seed new Mythic Threads too – just Google *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, or *Obama*.

Since the earliest large rituals, mages have used mass media to make things happen. The Syndicate, NWO, Cult of Ecstasy, and Celestial Chorus are the obvious masters of media, but any group or individual can employ it. (Rumors and evidence suggest that the Nephandi might be the greatest media masters of them all.) Given the vast reach provided by the Internet, data files, home-production technology, and the various things you can do with them all, anyone with a computer and Internet access can employ mass media. And though the Internet's signal-to-noise ratio makes it hard to create large and lasting impressions, a savvy person can use a single cell-phone picture to start waves rolling across our world.

Meditation: An intrinsic part of almost every mystic practice (and many technological ones as well), meditation involves quiet reflection through which a person screens out everyday distractions in order to connect with her inner self. Through meditation, a mage focuses her intentions, sorts through her circumstances, and often arrives at the next step she needs in order to move forward.

Optional Rule: Management and Human Resources

Certain folks extend their Will through the actions of other people. By managing and directing those other people, that sort of influence can turn human resources into instruments of magick. Now, we're not talking about transforming code-monkeys into flying monkeys... although that, too, *is* possible, albeit really vulgar and a major violation of HR policies. Instead, an *optional rule* may – at the Storyteller's discretion – allow certain **Mage** characters to use people as an instrument of their Arts.

A specialty of Syndicate bosses (see **Convention Book: Syndicate**, pps. 71-72) and other mages who favor social acumen and hypereconomics, the ***Management and Human Resources*** instrument gets a pack of underlings to perform your magick for you. Generally, these employees and devotees are Sleepers, not mages in the Awakened sense. What they do is totally within normal human limitations. Properly directed, though, they can change Consensus Reality in subtle yet significant ways: buying shares to tip the stock market, posting videos that promote an idea, revealing a theory or concept that tilts the Consensus through popular appeal, spreading rumors that destroy a target's reputation, using skills (medicine, transportation, fighting, finance) that the mage herself does not possess, and other everyday activities that have larger outcomes than people realize. It's a "*just say the word and it's done*" sort of magick that parlays social influence into altered reality.

As an instrument, management and human resources demands time, patience, and connections. The average schmo cannot snap his fingers and have a magical cabbie deliver him instantly from New York to DC. Ah – but a manager with clout can call Transport Services and have a helicopter waiting nearby within minutes; two or three hours later, he's gone from his executive suite in Manhattan to the steps of the Supreme Court, where an escort's waiting to usher him into a meeting with the judges who'll decide a case at the heart of U.S law... and thus, reality is changed. In game terms, the player could say that he used management as a tool of the dominion practice, focusing his belief in political power to perform a Correspondence 3/ Mind 3 Effect. No Paradox, little risk – that mage plays by Reality's rules, at the cost of a bit of time, indirect action, and some socially leveraged power.

(No, that mage does not use magick to conjure a helicopter and pilot – he's using resources that already exist. For details, see the sidebar ***Axis of Coincidence***, **p. 533**.)

Social power *is* essential to this option. A mage using management and human resources needs to have *at least three dots* in *at least two of the following Backgrounds*, plus a concept that allows him to boss people around and expect them to obey:

Necessary Management Background Traits

Allies (to do favors)

Backup (to deploy underlings)

Contacts (to utilize social leverage)

Cult (as per ***Backup***)

Fame (to get folks to help you)

Influence (pretty obvious)

Rank (reflects command and control)

Resources (because when money talks, people jump)

Retainers (that's what they're *for*, after all)

Spies (to perform the supposedly impossible)

Those underlings cannot do things that normal people could not accomplish. Turning folks into frogs is beyond this instrument, although turning them into fish food is totally do-able. Management takes time, too – you can say "*from my lips to God's ears*," but that "god" still acts on a human schedule. This rule's not meant to allow players to craft lawn-gnome armies or blow up cities with a few well-placed words. Still, social power *is* a form of magick, and its effects (and Effects) within our world can be miraculous.

Often simplified into mere relaxation, meditation actually runs much deeper than that. Given the hectic, distraction-filled world we live in, though, meditation's certainly a useful tool for relaxation as well as focus on greater things. Mages use meditation to connect to Primal Force, bridge minds and emotions, reach out to higher (or lower) powers, perceive their surroundings on a sublime level, access their inner resources, and plan the next move in their activities. As a tool, then, meditation works for just about anything, so long as the character has time to stop moving, focus on the meditation, and screen out distractions long enough to find what she seeks. It doesn't work well, obviously, in high-stress situations, although – given time – a character can use meditation to reduce her stress.

Traditionally depicted as a person sitting in a lotus position while humming *Ohm*, meditation can take many different forms. Postures, katas, games, prayer, running, chanting, dance, sex, music, even certain forms of fighting can all function as meditation. The vital element is the *mindset* of the person

meditating. If she views her practice as a meditative connection, and if it takes her where she needs to go, then almost anything can be a form of meditation. For further details, see the ***Meditation*** Ability in **Chapter Six**.

Money and Wealth: Money itself is a magic(k) trick. Essentially a symbolic token of trust, money defines a person's *val-you* within society. Societies, too, get defined by how much they're worth, so human and social realities are shaped by something that has no intrinsic value beyond what people *think* it means. (That trick's even more profound when you consider virtual money; burning dollar bills generate very little heat, but numbers in a database generate no heat at all.) Obviously, then, money provides a magickal focus for folks who know how to use it... and no faction understands money as well as the Syndicate does.

As a magickal tool, money has two potential forms: physical cash and virtual trade. Cash – paper money, coins, tokens, and so forth – allows the mage to pass along an Effect by passing along the cash. A $20.00 bill could carry a mind Effect that reminds someone of his mother; a Spanish piece of eight could bear an ancient curse; a defaced dollar bill might feature the message *THIS IS NOT YOUR GOD* stamped in red ink, focusing a Mind or Entropy Effect that degrades people's trust in social institutions. Cash often holds Resonance too, especially if it's been tainted by criminal acts or emotional desperation. As any mage knows, blood money is a real thing when you understand Resonance.

Virtual trade focuses Mind and/ or Entropy Effects that get people to believe that abstract numbers determine their fate. Checks, credit and debit cards, credit ratings, bank statements, and approval processes reflect uses of virtual trade. Such tools can be *extraordinarily* effective and dangerous. At the time this section was originally written, in real life, the United States government was temporarily shut down over an imaginary crisis built around virtual values that have no physical counterpart, only the *emotional* reality of what people *think* a bunch of numbers mean. Societies can rise and fall over such ideas, so the practice of *hypereconomics* (see ***The Art of Desire/ Hypereconomics***) manipulates virtual trade on a scale far beyond the possibilities of physical cash.

Music: One of the oldest magickal tools, music harnesses the powers of sound, art, memes, social influence, voices, symbols, and – in one way or another – many of the other tools on this list. A full exploration of the esoteric potential of music runs far beyond this space, and although its most obvious adherents include the Celestial Chorus, Bata'a, Dreamspeakers, Cult of Ecstasy, and Hollow Ones, *any* group or mage can use music as an instrument of focus.

As a general rule, music's vibrations carry the spell caster's intentions into the world. That music can be broadcast to a mass audience, performed for a smaller audience, or created in solitude for personal Effects. For obvious reasons, music takes time to perform but makes an ideal instrument for rituals, especially when a number of characters are working together to weave the Effect.

Depending upon the character, his audience, and the scope of the Effect, that music can range from quiet humming to a full-scale orchestral symphony. Lullabies, rock operas, chamber music, plaintive solo flute, vocalized chants... if there's a way to perform music, then there's a mystical practice associated with that type of performance.

Nanotech: Composed of miniscule, self-replicating machines, nanotechnology involves the study and design of productive engines on the molecular and atomic level. To Consensus reality, such technologies are largely theoretical; to technomancers – most especially the innovators of Iteration X and the Society of Ether – they're an essential tool for Enlightened Procedures.

Although all groups have been holding back that level of technology from the Masses (the consensus is that the Masses can't be trusted with it, and that's probably correct), nanotech forms a common instrument for Life and Matter Effects... most especially those Procedures that either build or repair structures or organisms. Technocratic healing Procedures often involve nanotech patches, and machines that grow out of nowhere actually spring from high-intensity (read: vulgar) nanotech clusters that create material structures faster than the human eye can follow.

That speed, combined with the high level of energy and material resources involved (in game terms, the amount of Quintessence they consume), keep nanotech out of wider use. Although favored Technocracy personnel employ nanotech instruments in many Threat Level A responses, the risks and requirements of existing nanotech... most especially the awful potential consequences of unregulated proliferation (read: someone else using the stuff)... assure that such innovations will remain restricted to certain agents and application within the foreseeable future.

Numbers and Numerology: Numbers hold power. As mentioned above under the ***Formulae*** entry, that power can be unlocked through arcane mathematics. Sometimes, though, all you need is a single number – nine, for example – to seal your mystical intentions.

On a related note, the occult practice of *numerology* draws connections between specific numbers and the deeper levels of Creation. As such, it provides a venerable focus for Correspondence, Spirit, Prime, or Time Arts, acting as a tool for understanding the ties between one thing and another. And so, beyond the baroque patterns of number theory, simple numbers or numerical correspondences (Bible verses, racing horses, sports-team player numbers, etc.) can be remarkably potent tools when they get assigned to something you're trying to accomplish.

Offerings and Sacrifices: Often, the best way to prove that you really want something involves giving up something else in order to obtain your goal. Thus, *sacrifice* ("to make sacred") holds a precious, though controversial, place in mystic practices. Essentially, a person offers up something precious – property, behavior, living things, even her own life – in order to seal a deal with the Powers That Be.

Typically associated with maleficia, sacrifice has an understandably bad rap. Slitting Fido's throat in order to summon devils is a terrible idea for all kinds of reasons. And yet, the custom of offering things up has deep spiritual roots in even the most virtuous traditions. Jesus, Raven, Odin, Prometheus... all of them sacrificed themselves in order to achieve a greater goal. Mortal devotees – Awakened and otherwise – use sacrifice as both a tool and a display of spiritual commitment. Even atheists understand the value of such offerings; it takes money, after all, to make money.

In game terms, a sacrifice involves giving up an offering as a tool in accomplishing the Effect. The nature and severity of that sacrifice depends upon the mage, her practice, and the goal she wants to achieve. Using the Prime Sphere, a mage could also harvest Quintessence from a sacrifice. But although live offerings have literally vital significance within many cultures, killing something in order to further your own ends raises obvious moral and legal questions, especially in our current era.

For more details, see the sourcebook **How Do You *DO* That?**.

Ordeals and Exertion: Pain has a marvelous way of focusing your attention. From the gruesome splendor of the Lakota sun-dance to the more prosaic practice of cutting, people employ techniques of significant anguish as methods for either getting out of their heads or, in contrast, getting "under the skin" to find the deeper layers there. Many mystic practices (and certain technological ones, too) employ agony as a tool for focus.

Athletic exertions, too, count toward such goals. Marathons, pumping iron, cage-fighting, extreme sports... they all take you out of the routine and into the moment and thus provide focus through intense experience. Physically, such exertions are ordeals – challenges that take a person to her limits and show her how much she's capable of doing. And so, for certain mages (especially Akashics, Thanatoics, Ecstatics, shamans, and Technocrats), the practice of intentional exertion provides a physical and symbolic way to "break on through" and reach new levels of reality.

Prayers and Invocations: Reaching out to higher or lower powers for support, a person can, with any luck, secure aid from the force in question. Among religious people, that force tends to be the god they worship or intercessors like saints, Loa, bodhisattvas, or guardian angels. Certain desperate folks, however, pray to devils or rival gods – a heretical but surprisingly common practice. Prayer could be considered a form of meditation too, especially when it's part of a daily ritual. For religious mages, prayer is *THE* instrument of choice. No other focus works as well or brings a devotee closer to his god.

Invocations aren't always prayers, but they still call in potent forces. Essentially, the mage speaks names or words of power (see ***Languages*** and ***Voice***) in order to make things happen. Materialist mages do this too; it's amazing how effective certain phrases ("*Nothing to see here,*" "*Death before dishonor,*" "*It's a fact – you can look it up*") can be when you say them with intention. An invocation speaks Will into activity, so buzzwords and battle cries figure prominently in the Arts of Change.

Sacred Iconography: The Qur'an. The cross. The pentacle. The Tau. Icons and scriptures. Prayer wheels and hell-money. The rich iconography of human religions provides an essential focus for mages of faith. Depending on the character's creed, the symbols in question could be brandished while casting an Effect; employed in rituals; worn simply as a reflection of faith; or possibly – for enemies of that faith – desecrated or destroyed in order to insult the creed in question, mock the power of its god(s), or co-opt that religion's resources in order to take them for oneself. In either case, those symbols contain potent emotional symbolism in addition to their potential mystic power.

Sacred materials almost always contain a strong Resonance from that faith. In certain cases – like the legendary power of the cross – that Resonance focuses the invested power of millions of believers... which may provide a metaphysical reason for the force such icons have against certain enemies of that faith (like, say, vampires). Employed by a mage from the appropriate religion, a powerful instrument of faith – holy water, sanctified earth, a famous shrine, and so on – could contain a bit of Quintessence that it lends to the mage in question. Holy symbols tend to make certain Effects coincidental when they're performed among faithful Sleepers, too; a group of devout Catholics won't be surprised to see a priest perform a miracle.

Sex and Sensuality: Sex is fun. Sex is scary. Sex is the most intimate thing you can share with another person, short of killing or giving birth. Hence, sex and sensuality (that is, close but not necessarily sexual contact) hold places of honor and shame among many mystical and technological practices. Certain disciplines – Left-Hand and Westernized Tantra, Gardnerian Wicca, Taoist sexual alchemy, the reclaimed Qadishtu tradition, and other forms of sacred eros – employ sex acts to focus life energy and dedicated magicks. Others simply stage orgies and Bacchanalia as tools for ecstatic worship, mysticism, and release.

As the entries about ***Bodywork*** and ***Energy*** suggest, sex rituals provide intimate contact for mystics both Awakened and otherwise. Sometimes regarded as communion between masculine and feminine polarities, other times used to break down concepts of gender and identity, occasionally corrupted into violation (especially in maleficia), and frequently employed as initiation (particularly in the Cult of Ecstasy, the Verbena, and certain Hermetic lodges and religious orders), ritualized sexuality mingles the primal essence of all parties involved. Given that level of contact, such practices share Resonance and make ideal instruments for Life, Mind, and Prime Arts... although, as certain lovers can attest, sex has a way of making Time move faster or slower for *you*, too.

Social Domination: The superior person does not wait on the whims of others. That person – male or female – moves the world through force of personality. He might not be a tyrant – he might, in fact, be most effective when he *isn't* one – but his word commands respect. Mages are superior people, and the most dominant of them use that knowledge to impose their Will upon the people in their lives.

The art of "alphaing" people isn't necessarily what folks think it is. Although Alpha-Male/ Bitch types do tend to get their way in the short term, people resent them for it, often screwing them over out of vindictive spite. The most effective dominant people make people *glad* to be in their service. They inspire love as well as respect, and they garner long-term loyalty as a result.

Sometimes, though, short-term results are enough to work with. A bully *can* impose dominance upon people, turning them into agents of his Enlightened Will. And really, let's not kid ourselves: abusive bastards run corporations, governments, cults, and even Traditions. The word *sociopath* is so loaded these days. We'll simply call those people *movers and shakers*: they move, and you shake.

As a magickal instrument, social dominance plays out through command of group situations. Rank, eye contact, imposing body language, and sometimes threats provide the obvious tactics, but a seriously dominant person evokes that impression by simply *being there*. Presence and eloquence work far better than brutality, so a mage who uses domination – a prized skill in the Technocracy, but useful in every other faction too – directs his Arts (typically Entropy, Mind, Life, and Prime Effects) through force of personality, social cues, and the ability to back up his commands with Will when need be.

For obvious expansions on this idea, see the ***Might is Right*** paradigm and the practices of ***dominion*** and the ***Art of Desire***.

Symbols: Technically, every instrument on this list is a symbol. As an instrument in its own right, however, a symbol takes a powerful image or omen – a flag, a glyph, a raven, etc. – and then directs a practice and Effect through that vehicle. The mage who unleashes a Mind Effect by unfurling a flag (or burning it) employs a symbol as a tool of his practice. Folks who wear significant symbols – like Captain America or Batman – evoke the power of that sign, adopting its mystique as their own. Mages do this sort of thing all the time; after all, doesn't a wizard look more impressive in his brocade robes and rune-carved staff than he would if he were simply wearing jeans?

Thought Forms: Behind every potent symbol, there's supposedly a level of psychic reality. The belief and life force invested in that symbol – and connecting it to the thing it supposedly represents – grants a level of reality to that symbol and the principles behind it. In modern occultism, that reality is sometimes called an *egregore*: a "watcher" that attains a sort of sentience because people believe in it.

Although various practices disagree about the nature of egregores (are they independent spirit entities, psychic constructs, imaginary concepts, quantum-particle activity principles, or simply human mind games invested with belief?), these thought forms become instruments for various practices, most especially chaos magick, crazy wisdom, shamanism, reality hacking, some forms of High Ritual, the Art of Desire, hypereconomics, and – as certain postmodernist mages would argue – *every* form of magickal practice, particularly the religious ones.

(You could think of an egregore as a meme-god; some occultists, in fact, would argue that both memes *and* gods are egregores, and that no distinction between the three of them exists. Yes, mages argue about some pretty weird shit.)

In game terms, a character uses a thought form by constructing a symbol, either in her imagination or in some physical and/ or social form, and then meditating upon it. If she can convince other people to invest psychic energy into the symbol, so much the better – a potent egregore becomes a stronger instrument. By calling upon that symbol as she casts a spell, either through meditation or invocation, she can focus her intentions through it as she would any other sort of instrument. It works because her belief has granted reality to the thought form, creating something from nothing. And so, although the mage appears to be working without an instrument, that instrument is actually something she holds in her head, believing – rightly or otherwise – that it has external reality as well.

Beyond the egregores of various mass-media constructions (Mickey Mouse, Team Edward, even Axe body spray), an especially pervasive thought form rules the 21st century: the Corporate Citizen. Employed to devastating effect by the Syndicate, Nephandi, and other corporate-culture mavens (Awakened and otherwise), the Corporate Citizen has become the most powerful political force of our era. Wearing many different masks... one hopes... this thought form channels immense energy for the people who understand how to use it as an instrument. A CNN press pass can focus potent applications of the Mind Sphere; a Koch credit card could channel access to incredible amounts of wealth, and the Axe citizen might indeed facilitate Life-based enchantments. The idea that there could be *many different* entities spawned from Corporate-Citizen thought forms – each with its own powers and agendas – is too frightening to contemplate... and yet, it might also be the truth.

Toys: Magick need not always be serious. Playful items – tops, blocks, dolls, toy soldiers, little cars, games, and so forth – often find their way into the Arts, especially when those Arts are being practiced by Marauders, kids, street mages, Awakened parents, geek-culture mavens, and consistently young-at-heart folks like Willy Wonka or Mr. Magorium.

Toys can be creepy too, of course... especially the ones that come to life when you sleep, watch you after midnight, or seem to know a bit more than you'd like them to know about things you'd rather not have *ANYONE* find out about. Ouija boards, creepy dolls, action figures with working guns... such tools provide hours of fun for mages whose idea of play is rather sinister...

Tricks and Illusions: "*It's an ILLOOOOSION!*" Mages who've learned how to hide their Arts in plain sight can at least *try* to pass off their Effects as stage trickery. If the magician in question has an arsenal of real-life tricks – ones that don't actually employ True Magick but sleight-of-hand and misdirection – it's far easier to then convince the Masses that the flying car or teleportation jump was simply another cool illusion.

On a similar note, pranks, gags, pratfalls, traps, con-jobs, and other tricks can be useful tools for the mystic or hypertech Arts as well. A well-executed prank or scam is kind of like magick to begin with; if the grifter just happens to employ real magick to make her tricks more effective, well, then she's simply very good at the game. Gamblers and survivalists can put Correspondence, Entropy, Life, Mind, and Matter to good use by wrapping such Effects up in tricks and traps. And as for illusions, Mind excels at getting folks to see what they *want* to see, not necessarily what's really going on.

Certain Social Abilities provide excellent dice pools for this instrument; for details, see the ***Art***, ***Blatancy***, ***Expression***, ***High Ritual***, ***Seduction,*** and ***Subterfuge*** Talents in **Chapter Six**.

True Names: To name something is to define it; to name some*one* is to have control over them. For this reason, among others, mages often hide their identities, taking on craft names and adopted monikers that differ from their full birth names. The New World Order, of course, has access to any legal record they care to check... which gives them an edge when they want someone's True Name. From a technomagickal standpoint, an American's Social Security Number might work just as well as... or *better than*... her True Name if the mage wants to hold power over that citizen.

In game terms, the Storyteller may rule that an enemy with someone's True Name – that is, her full legal name, perhaps with childhood nicknames attached – might act against that person as if the enemy has a unique personal instrument (-2 to casting difficulties). That option might be a bit too powerful for comfort; then again, such power could underscore the point that we take privacy too lightly in this era...

Vehicles: KITT. Blue Thunder. Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang and every car ever driven by James Bond. Modern mages know how to get the most out of that cornerstone of our era: the magic vehicle. And though such conveyances tend to be Wonders in their own right, a tinkerer or driver can work his Arts through any properly maintained machine.

Enchanted vehicles aren't always modern machines. Coachmen used to be infamous for their apparent gift for driving coaches between worlds, and High Artisans gained renown for their devastating war machines. Sailing ships, ironclads, old diving bells, skates, even surfboards can provide a focus for transportation magicks.

For rules dealing with vehicles, inventions, and repairs, see ***The Technological World*** in **Chapter Nine**.

Voice and Vocalizations: Vibrations from the human throat focus astonishing Effects. From singing or recognizable words (see ***Music*** and ***Language***, above) to the wordless cries, gibberish, or evocative singing techniques collectively known as *glossolalia* ("babbling tongue"), vocalizations feature prominently in mystic practices. Both the terms *gibberish* and *jabber* come, it has been said, from the 8th-century Arab alchemist Jabir ibn Hazyan, who disguised his forbidden formulas in terms so incomprehensible that would-be translators referred to his work as "Jabir-ish."

In mystic practices, non-linguistic utterances and nonsense phrases often evoke sublime states of mind because they seem significant even though they defy discernable language. The "speaking in tongues" so popular in prophecy and evangelism;

Vision Quests

Although it's too involved and self-contained to function as a practical tool, the *vision quest* forms an important rite of passage within many mystic traditions. Essentially, a mystic pits herself against challenges both internal and external, removing herself from the everyday world and facing extreme deprivation in an effort to reach new insights and triumph over limitations.

Almost mandatory for shamans and common among Ecstatics, Thanatoics, witches, neotribalists, and other people beyond the fringe, a vision quest typically involves prayer, fasting, and a retreat from every familiar thing. Most often, the quester goes off into the wilderness with as little food, water, and equipment as she's willing to dare. Certain cultures favor vision quests without any food or clothing whatsoever – the quester depends upon survival skills, luck, and the kindness of her gods. Danger... up to and including the possibility of death... is an essential feature of the vision quest. If it was easy, then it would mean nothing.

Psychoactive entheogens often play a role in the quest; even without them, the mystic might endure hallucinations from hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and exposure. Vision questers tend to pass into the Otherworlds, either mentally or in an extra-physical sense. Spirits both real and delusional arrive to test the mystic. Totems often choose their favored mortals through such ordeals. Failure to pass such tests can mean madness, illness, death, or – if you're lucky – a nasty detour that forces the quester to call upon her deepest inner strength.

If and when a quester returns, she often brings back tokens of her experience: feathers, stones, scars, and so forth. If a spirit has favored that person, then that patron leaves the mystic with a token of its esteem. It's possible to fail a vision quest, of course... to get lost and require rescuing, to disgrace yourself by cheating, and even – perhaps worst of all – to endure the whole thing and learn nothing from the experience.

In game terms, a vision quest could be a solo adventure in which a single character goes off to test herself. The ***Environmental Hazards*** systems in **Chapter Nine** can provide rules for such scenarios, most especially the sections regarding weather, starvation, falls, poisons, and drugs. See also ***The Otherworlds*** rules in that same chapter and the ***Bestiary*** and ***Totem Spirits*** sections of **Appendix I**.

the channeled speech or singing of mediums and trance-artists; the passionate cries of sex, euphoria, and pain... all of them work as tools of magickal focus. Even primal sounds – snarls, growls, whining, and so forth – can contain mystic influence. And although hypertech practices tend to frown upon indecipherable words, the cyborg who snarls as he aims his chain-gun might not *need* Spheres in order to get his point across!

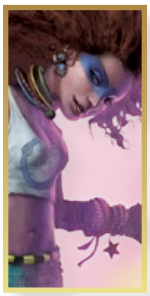
Wands, Rods, and Staves: Harry Potter's crew understands the mythic quality of wands and wizard-staves. Acting as extensions of the mage's arm (and, symbolically, his Will and other parts of his anatomy), these instruments become common yet formidable tools. Best of all, they can be practical in the everyday world as well. Although a wand won't do much for you beyond directing mystic spells, a rod or staff could serve as a walking stick, prop, or weapon... especially for mages who spend lots of time in the wilderness, where hiking sticks get plenty of use.

Weapons: Tools of ill omen tend to find their way into Awakened hands, often becoming channels for Entropy, Forces, Life, and Matter Arts. *Any* Sphere, of course, could manifest through a weapon: Spirit-crafted bullets to shoot at ghosts; Time-enhanced guns that fire at phenomenal speed; Correspondence arrows that fly impossible distances, Warrior-Princess throwing discs that seem to fly of their own accord; or swords or staves so imposing that only Mind magick could explain their mystique. A canny mage doesn't even need to enchant their weapon in order to use it as an instrument for Arts; a simple Mind-push tacked onto a witty soliloquy could do the trick. ("*Drop. Your. Sword.*")

Chapter Nine's *Combat* section features extensive rules for weapons and Sphere-enhanced combat techniques. Here, let's simply say that weapons – from a witch's athame to a Black Suit's gun – are among the most popular tools for magickal focus. Even outside combat situations, a sword or dagger holds potent ritual significance. (See also ***Armor***, ***Devices***, and ***Offerings and Sacrifices***.)

Writings, Inscriptions, and Runes: Writing is a magickal act. Long before literacy became a common trait, the man or woman who could read and write understood the secret lore of texts and scriptures. Even now, the act of physically writing something down (or carving or engraving it into a surface) gives that magick a sense of permanence. It was for this art that Odin hanged himself on the World Tree, that Chinese calligraphers spent their days in meditative bliss, that monks and friars, scribes and nuns devoted themselves to copying holy words in sacred texts. And even now, a smart blog post or text message can change somebody's world. True, there's a huge difference between cutting bloody runes in your flesh, scribing an illuminated scripture, and texting a Twitter observation. Any and all of these methods, though, can focus magickal intentions. Hell, even writing a roleplaying book could be considered an act of Will...

Part VIII: Adjustments, Procedures, and Rotes



The diverse powers of the Awakened are without measure. Despite vast collections of rotes, Procedures, and other such applications of the Arts, each mage is his or her own spellbook, crafting Effects to suit the circumstances of that moment. Even so, every Awakened and Enlightened group has special tricks and rituals that its members use when necessary. The following section presents a very brief look at the established Effects of the Awakened world.

For easy reference, each of the following entries has been listed by the highest Sphere(s) involved in the Effect, then by the next-highest Spheres, and so on. Many of these entries have optional components that can be added on by a mage who knows the proper Spheres. Remember that a character needs to know *all* of the essential Spheres involved, and must have the dots required in those Spheres, before he can use a listed Effect. Bruce Foster, for example, must have at least three dots in Forces before he can try **Hot-Shotting** his guns. He doesn't have to have Mind 2 as well; if he *does* have it, though, then he could add the Mind-based intimidation factor to his attack.

The following Effects and spells display only a small sample of Awakened possibilities. For more extensive acts of magick, see the ***Common Magickal Feats chart***, the sourcebook **How Do You DO That?** and the many books in the **Mage: The Ascension** line. Note that older books might have different systems, thanks to the rule changes between editions. When in doubt, use the rules in this edition to determine what an Effect can do.

Enlightened Adjustments

Subtle acts of Enlightened understanding and manipulation, Adjustments remain coincidental except under the most extreme or skeptical circumstances. Although the Syndicate and New World Order specialize in such workings, other technomancers can employ them too. With minor variations in practice and instruments, a mystic mage can use these Adjustments as well – probably under another, more poetic name, but with the Spheres and systems intact.

Black Card/ Little Black Box
(•• Correspondence/ •• Forces/ •• Mind)

If you've watched an action thriller within the last decade or two, then you've seen this trick in action: The security expert/ thief/ superspy takes out a little black box or card, hooks it into (or passes it through) some part of the security system, stands back, and lets the lights flash and the numbers blur by until the digital locks open and the system lets her in. Real-life systems don't work that way, of course, but a little technomagick can.

System: Game-wise, the little black box trick allows a mage with Correspondence 2, Forces 2 and Mind 2 to attempt to hack controls she couldn't possibly reach, so long as those controls are networked into the place where the she's using the box or card. The mage still needs to successfully hack the system and must make the requisite rolls with the requisite skills – see ***Hacking*** on the ***Dramatic Feats*** **chart** in **Chapter Nine**, p. 403. Technically, this sort of thing should be vulgar magick; the black box, however, renders this trick coincidental. After all, the character's just using advanced technology to crack the system. You see that sort of thing in movies all the time...

Hot-Shotting
(•• Forces; possibly with •• Mind)

Anyone who's ever watched a movie from the last few decades recognizes the ominous "*CHK-CHK*" of a cocked shotgun, the click of a pistol's hammer, the "*SHHHING*" of a drawn blade, or the clack of a rifle-bolt slapping into place. By modifying her weaponry and then playing upon the psychological effect of media-instilled dread, a Technocratic operative can get her target to stand down, increase the efficiency of her attacks, or project a storm of fire so intense that only the strongest Reality Deviants can stand against it.

System: A correctly trained operative – that is, one with the right Spheres – can use a simple Crafts roll to modify her weapon so that it makes more noise and gets a bit of extra kinetic kick. The Forces Sphere enhances both the sonic timbre of the sound and the kinetic damage of its strike. The resulting effects upon the target could be seen as psychological warfare, skillful applications of physics, or both.

Each success reduces the difficulty for the agent's next attack by -1, and adds one automatic success for the Forces Sphere. If she so chooses, the player may apply that bonus to an intimidation-based attack (to get the target to surrender without a fight); to damage (thus hitting the target harder than usual); to targets (allowing her to hit more than one of them with the next attack); or to a mixture of them all. For details, see the ***Optional Dividing Successes Rule***, p. 538.

The addition of Mind 2 turns the **Hot-Shotting** Adjustment into an explicit psychological threat. In this case, the ominous sound is enough to make most targets surrender right away. The player rolls against a difficulty of the target's Willpower; if her successes equal or exceed the target's Willpower, then the target gives up without a fight. If not... well, then, that first shot still has a lot more force to back up the agent's argument.

Hands of Death
(••• Life, •• Forces, or both; possibly with •• Entropy and/ or •• Prime added)

The refined technologies of martial skill allow fragile human beings to defy the apparent laws of physics and biology. Thanks

Effects, Rotes, or What?

In previous editions, *Effect* referred to single-Sphere spells, and *rote* referred to spells with more than one Sphere involved. *Procedure*, *Adjustment*, and *spell* all referred to either option. For clarity's sake, **Mage 20** refers to all workings as Effects, uses *rote* or *spell* to refer to pre-prepared mystic workings that have a sense of history, and *Adjustment* and *Procedure* to refer to Technocratic and technomagickal rotes that have official sanction within the affiliated groups.

to the indisputable gifts of such accomplishment, a man or woman can punch holes in walls, shatter planks or stones, and cripple or kill a foe with one well-executed blow. There's no magick involved, of course – merely the proven applications of science. And so, although such arts will not allow a person to fly around like some Hong Kong action hero, they do permit a sufficiently trained person to deal out unspeakable amounts of damage with hands and feet alone.

Outside the ranks of skilled martial artists, Technocrats (and other mages too) can employ cybernetic enhancements, anatomical knowledge, and sheer attitude in a quest to lay their opponents out in bloody heaps across the floor. And unless the act becomes so outrageous that it defies belief, such attacks remain impressive... yet coincidental.

System: An agent's kicks, punches, and strikes inflict damage as per the ***Damage*** or ***Duration*** chart, with one automatic success from the Forces Sphere. Most often, this Effect uses martial arts as an instrument and a practice, although other options have been noted above. Forces adds to the kinetic impact of a blow, and Life targets the opponent's Pattern. A coincidental blow does not inflict aggravated damage, but a truly theatrical (and typically vulgar) blow might.

As options, the martial artist might also add Entropy to spot weak points and thus reduce armor, Durability, or soak rolls by one level per success, or add Prime to charge his fists with chi energy and thus inflict aggravated damage. The first option is not vulgar, but the second one is.

Right-Click

(••• Mind/ ••• Data; often with • Forces, • Life, • Matter, • Prime, •• Dimensional Science, or any combination of the above)

The Information Age opens many doors, especially when you know how to knock right. Originally created by either the Virtual Adepts or New World Order (both groups claim the bragging rights), this trick allows a person with access to the correct information – usually through a cybernetic uplink, BCI, or some other interface like the datacrawl described in the **Prelude** and **Appendix II** – to pull up pertinent data about people, places, and things.

A mental right-click grants access to the source of information, typically through the Internet, a home-based data collection, or both. The data appears like a readout in the mage's mind's eye, offering surface data about whatever the mage happens to be looking at when he focuses his mental cursor over it and activates the right-click. That data generally covers only the most basic information, although a truly skilled operator (that is, someone with a high Arete/ Enlightenment Trait and a lot of successes) can uncover surprising amounts of information about the subject in question.

System: Mind 3 scans the surface thoughts of sentient subjects, while a connected Mind 1 multitasking Effect lets the mage process the information without distraction. Data 3 – *an essential element of this rote!* – grants remote access to computerized information; without it, the mage is simply a telepath.

Meanwhile, the other optional Spheres allow the mage to trace energies with ultraviolet or infrared scanning abilities (Forces 1); spot the state of health in living things and detect their body heat signatures (Life 1); scan the physical properties of an object (Matter 1); employ X-ray vision on structures or organisms (Life 1/ Matter 1); note flows of Quintessence energy (Prime 1); or employ a combination of the above. Each additional type of vision beyond the first one, however, adds +1 difficulty to the character's perception rolls, due to the overlapping visual fields. A simple data scan works normally, but adding heat-signature vision, X-ray vision, and infrared visual capabilities to that data scan adds +3 to the viewer's difficulty as well.

For targets who have social media pages, Twitter feeds, and so forth, the mage can read their latest updates, pull up pictures they have posted, et cetera. From a purely psychological perspective, this can provide a devastating edge for a technomancer who wants to play nasty. Someone who checks into Foursquare can be tracked with the **Right-Click** once the mage has had a chance to right-click on her at least once. Until and unless she stops feeding her location into the global database, the technomancer can access her current location.

In order to employ this rote, the character must focus his magick through some data-based technological instrument (cell phone, cybernetic implant, VDAS, etc.) that can access a larger database. Thanks to the definition of this Effect, however, *it does not allow the character to scan something that's not in a computerized database*. That's not because the Spheres can't *see* a given phenomenon but because you can't access information if there's no information to access.

At the Storyteller's option, a technomancer who has access to a database of extraphysical entities – that is, spirits – can use Spirit 1 to right-click that information too. Certain members of the Order of Hermes have been building Umbrood databases for just this purpose, and the Void Engineers have extensive files on the things their group has encountered. As mentioned below, however, such files might not necessarily be accurate...

Unless the right-click interface has been configured to cross dimensions with Dimensional Science 2, this rote cannot be employed from the Otherworlds. This restriction does *not* apply, however, if the characters are in the Digital Web.

Because no one can see it except for the person using the interface, a **Right-Click** is coincidental. The level of information access is based upon the number of successes rolled:

Successes	Level of Information
One	Surface data (name, vital statistics)
Two	Simple data (social-media updates, web posts, common schematics)
Three	Uncommon data (social-media backlog, web-post archives, phone logs, rare schematics)
Four	Hidden/ buried data (criminal records, voting info, obscure or protected schematics)
Five	Classified data (medical records, personal files, protected info from personal computer, classified schematics)
Six +	If there's data available, the character can access it.

Really large amounts of data might take several turns to scan... perhaps even an hour or more for subjects with overwhelming amounts of information.

Note that the information accessed by a right-click might not necessarily be accurate. Even the NWO has flawed data, so the Storyteller should feel free to feed false information to a player who employs this rote.

Hypernarrative Influence
(•••• Mind; possibly with •• Entropy added)

Mass media programs its audience to accept certain messages as intrinsic truths about life. People have become so indoctrinated by the concept of a "hero's journey" that the Masses often see themselves as players in some vast heroic saga. Other so-called *hypernarratives* – tropes and stories so familiar that they've become part of the cultural lexicon – include the romantic comedy, the sitcom, the slasher movie, the buddy movie, the chick flick, and the wacky-hijinks caper. (Faerie tales appeal to the hypernarratives as well, but Technocrats avoid playing on *those* tropes if they can help it...)

By employing certain phrases ("*Let the girl go – I'm the one you want!*"), archetypes (Gay Best Friend), or tropes (Enemies Become Allies), a skillful agent can induce another character to follow the script and live out that role. Essentially, the agent calls upon media-instilled social programming and then gives it a push with Enlightened Psychodynamics (the Mind Sphere). Unless the target consciously understands that he's being fed his lines, he falls into the role and fulfills the hypernarrative's demands.

System: The Mind Sphere influences the target to follow the script. A successful Manipulation + Art or Expression roll triggers the desired behavior. Generally, this Effect lasts for one scene, although the player can extend its effects by spending successes on Duration and then play a particular role (lover, villain, sidekick, etc.) for a while.

Thanks to pervasive media culture, this Effect is coincidental unless the target comes from one of the very few cultures that are not familiar with mass-media tropes. But familiarity, as the saying goes, also breeds contempt: a failed or botched roll – or successful resistance from a savvy target – can deflate the hypernarrative because the target has recognized the cliché ("*SERIOUSLY?!? Did you really just SAY that?*") and refuses to go along with it.

By adding an Entropy element – generally established by invoking the hypernarrative and calculating the odds of probability – the agent can influence events that support the hypernarrative. Guns might run out of ammunition, cars could explode, beautiful strangers or random cats wind up distracting the target, and other pop-media coincidences manifest at just the right time to fulfill the hypernarrative. In this case, a successful Enlightenment roll tilts the probabilities of coincidence **(see the *Axis of Coincidence* sidebar, pp. 533-534)** in favor of a media-inspired event. The agent cannot control that event – that's the Storyteller's job; still, things will favor an appropriately dramatic (or comedic) twist of fate... not that Technocrats *believe* in such things!

For a staggering selection of hypernarrative devices, check out the TV Tropes Wiki at *http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HomePage*.

Technocratic Procedures

Sometimes, you need to haul out the Big Guns. And so, although the following Procedures are refined and standardized techniques among the Technocratic Union's ranks, they lack the pristine subtlety of Adjustments and may risk the Paradox Effect under many circumstances.

Even when she chooses to be vulgar, though, a Technocrat still needs to use practices and instruments in order to make such things come to pass. As noted elsewhere, a Technocrat believes so strongly in the principles behind her Procedures that she cannot perform them without the proper tools and techniques. A Progenitor (to use an example out of a very old **Mage** chronicle) cannot simply wave her hyper-scalpel and cut someone who's several yards away; she *MUST* have a valid scientific reason for the things she can do. Unlike those mystic Reality Deviants, she doesn't make the Consensus dance to her whims but rather employs advanced principles of technology to make things work her Will.

Sanitize Evidence
(•• Matter/ •• Forces, and/ or •••• Prime)

When it's time to clean up a mess – bloodstains, bodies, bullet holes, and other evidence of regrettable havoc – a Technocratic Sanitization Squad comes in with special devices and supplies. Within a short time, the Sanitization Squad reconstructs the damage, destroys evidence, and recycles waste products into useful energies (through Forces or Prime), leaving nothing behind to disturb the Masses' calm.

System: Processing a scene of mayhem takes time... and thus, in game terms, it usually requires an extended roll. Each Enlightenment roll made when conducting a **Sanitize Evidence** operation reflects one hour of uninterrupted work, and each success renders 10 pounds of matter into pure energy. Extreme carnage demands extreme measures. And so, when a large area needs to be sanitized, several trained Technocrats employ this Procedure at once, dividing up the task between them.

Even using impressive machinery, this Procedure is vulgar, so it's essential to keep the scene clear of innocent bystanders and nosy cops. For that reason, this sort of operation also includes teammates who employ the **Secure the Scene** Procedure to keep the area clear of prying eyes and note important bits of evidence that need to be catalogued and then purged before the Masses learn too much. Due to the unstable nature of converting matter into energy, a botch with this Procedure immediately invokes the Paradox Effect, usually with a catastrophic explosion or meltdown of the gear.

Secure the Scene
(•• or ••• Mind/ • Forces/ • Matter; possibly with ••• Forces added)

The ugly fallout from Reality Deviant insurgencies (and the necessary containments thereof) requires Procedures that keep the Masses and their mundane law-enforcement agencies in the often-literal dark. And so, when drastic operations or Consensus-shattering events pose a threat to the security of essential illusions, wise Technocracy operatives invoke the Secure Scene Protocols, sealing up the area while scanning for evidence that must, for obvious reasons, be purged.

A few hazard signs or strips of police tape activate a Psychodynamics Procedure that warns people away from the area. Usual security measures simply broadcast a subtle *Stay away* impulse, whereas high-intensity measures keep all but the most determined trespassers at a distance.

Meanwhile, the agents on the scene operate scanning gear that detects evidence and damage. Forces 1 and Matter 1 perception Effects pick up traces of blood, gunpowder, and other residue that might not be visible to the naked eye, allowing the agents to record and then eliminate the messy aftermath of those events.

System: In order to **Secure the Scene**, a Technocrat needs to score at least three successes on a coincidental magick roll. Large areas might need five successes or more.

As noted above, Mind Sphere Effects discourage trespassers from entering the secured area; the Mind 2 variation suggests avoidance, and the Mind 3 version actively drives people away. In order to enter the scene, a character needs to make a Willpower roll that scores more successes than the operative who established the Effect.

The scanning element, meanwhile, reduce by -1 the difficulties for all of the Perception + Alertness rolls the agents make to detect evidence of the recent events. Thanks to those enhanced perceptions, the agent(s) can see into the infrared and ultraviolet spectrums, might spot fingerprints, and could note hairline cracks and other traces of evidence or damage. Given time, the Technocrats can catalog and then purge that evidence, often with the **Sanitize Evidence** Procedure described above.

Generally, this Procedure does not conceal the area from outside observation – it drives people away, but the space itself remains visible. By bringing in the appropriate cloaking-field projectors, however, the Technocrat(s) can add

a Forces 3 blackout component that warps light and sound around the secured area, essentially rendering it dark and silent to casual observation. This additional protocol doesn't project an actual illusion – that's an entirely different Effect. The blackout field, though, shrouds the location in darkness while baffling sound waves to muffle the acoustics within that space. A sufficiently skilled and equipped operative can set up all three components – the Mind field, the scanners, and the light/ sound baffling effects – in a single burst of activity. The blackout field, however, adds another three successes to the overall total required, which also adds another layer of time and complication to the Effect. It's also a vulgar Procedure unless it's activated in near or total darkness.

Dimension Bomb
(••• Dimensional Science; possibly with ••• Forces/ •• Prime added)

Nasty things wait on the other side of the Dimensional Gauntlet. And so, Technocrats who understand the weird physics of Dimensional Science can send surprises into that realm to deal with said nasty things before they can pass through and disrupt our material home.

Generally, the **Dimension Bomb** Procedure involves calibrating a specially designed grenade or other sort of explosive, then phasing it through the Gauntlet to explode harmlessly on the other end. Although this sort of attack has lost favor somewhat since the Dimensional Anomaly occurred (rumors suggest that the Anomaly originated with a large Dimension Bomb that was somewhat more... *efficient* than expected), it's still a useful tactic when dimension-hopping were-things start popping into or out of Consensus space.

System: With a successful roll, the operative can push a small explosive device through a hole in the Gauntlet and phase-shift it into the weird matter of the Otherworlds. Once there, it has the usual effects for such a device. Failed rolls or botches, however, have a nasty tendency to hold the object between worlds, inflicting the damage on both sides of the Gauntlet.

The Forces 3/ Prime 2 variation uses the bomb as a focus for a Forces-based explosion. Higher Ranks of Forces can be used for larger explosions. Each success that isn't spent getting the bomb through the Gauntlet acts as Forces-based damage, described on the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***. (If it takes three successes to get through the Gauntlet, for instance, and the player rolls six successes, then the bomb inflicts six health levels of damage.) In either case, the roll's difficulty is the Gauntlet rating, which makes this Procedure far more effective in low-Gauntlet areas than in high-Gauntlet ones.

All versions of this Procedure are vulgar, and Paradox damage typically involves blowback damage from the blast. For details about ***Explosions***, see the section of that name in **Chapter Nine**.

Golden Gunman (••• Time/ •• Forces)

The joys of high-octane action movies can be yours with the proper expertise! Pulling out two impressive handguns (or, in hand-to-hand variations, two blades, clubs, or other flashy weapons), a skilled operative can commit stylish acts of mayhem.

System: Time allows the operative to take multiple actions with both hands while avoiding the penalties described in **Chapter Nine**'s ***Combat*** section. Each attack gets rolled normally, and the operative may target several different attacks at several different enemies. The Forces Sphere, meanwhile, allows the operative to flip through the air, make amazing leaps, and blaze away with several guns while somehow negating the recoil of such heavy firepower. Best of all – thanks to the popularity of such cinematic stunts – this physics-defying Procedure tends to be coincidental. That said, a botched roll or Paradox backlash leads to spectacular mishaps and tragedies worthy of John Woo's most melodramatic excesses. (*Where the hell did all those doves* COME *from, anyway...?*)

Optional Rule: Social Conditioning and Reprogramming

Certain forms of influence aren't subtle. The Technocratic Union's sophisticated practice of ***Social Conditioning*** (referred to in **Chapter Five**) adjusts people for the greater levels of reality employed by the Technocracy. In its most delicate forms, this Conditioning allows an unEnlightened person to accept, and occasionally employ, the advanced technologies used by the Union. Stronger levels of Conditioning reinforce the loyalty of errant operatives or convince Reality Deviants to accept the Technocratic truth.

At their ultimate extent, those processes reprogram the subject's personality, replacing free will with obedience. Despite common misconception, the Union doesn't use this drastic measure often. If nothing else, it's resource-intensive, and it often leaves the recipient more or less useless for anything other than manual labor and low-priority tasks.

Because Conditioning restricts a character's free will, Social Conditioning remains an *optional rule* when it's used against a player character. If the player chooses to go along with Social Conditioning, then the Storyteller can pass notes to her and give her subtle hints about what her character should be doing as a result of her programming. For extra levels of treachery, the character may be Conditioned offstage, in a process that only the player and Storyteller know about. That way, the character could begin to subvert her group, based on the implanted Conditioning.

Social Conditioning implies an organized, refined, and resource-intensive program of reeducation. No individual mage or independent cabal can use these rules – they must rely upon the usual influence-based methods. Although the Technocracy employs the most effective forms of Social Conditioning, the Nephandi and other groups occasionally use similar processes on captives and converts, with the differences noted below. If the Nephandi in question *also* happen to be Technocratic PsychOps, however, then that captured character – and all of her associates – could be in *very* serious trouble.

Conditioning Levels

Social Conditioning follows 10 stages, each one more intrusive than the last:

- **Stage One - Indoctrination:** The character becomes a willing convert.
- **Stage Two - Submission:** That convert allows minor magickal Effects to be used on her, without resistance.
- **Stage Three - Suspicion:** Following the dictates of her masters, the character regards people as allies or enemies.
- **Stage Four - Ostracism:** If the masters declare someone anathema, the convert will shun that person.
- **Stage Five - Pacifism:** The masters instill a code word that can immediately make the convert cease all violent activities.
- **Stage Six - Conspiracy:** The masters can implant a code word that initiates covert activity against someone who's been chosen as an enemy.
- **Stage Seven - Alliance:** The Conditioned character trusts the masters implicitly; their allies become her friends, and their enemies become anathema. A Sleeper at this level is no longer a witness against vulgar technomagick used by the masters, and a mage becomes a total convert to the masters' paradigm.
- **Stage Eight - Rejection:** If so ordered, the character will forget anyone she has been told to forget; those people literally disappear from her memory, at least for a while.
- **Stage Nine - Devotion:** The convert will betray anyone or anything for the sake of her masters.
- **Stage Ten - Reverence:** "*He had learned to love big Brother.*"

For Socially-Conditioned characters, the player ought to keep a record of her character's current level of indoctrination. If she chooses to fight it later, see ***Breaking Conditioning***, below.

Conditioning Systems

Story-wise, Social Conditioning involves isolation from outside contact, followed by intensive psychological indoctrination. A willing Sleeper or eager technomancer might simply receive a subtle but pervasive orientation program that introduces him to the wonders of the Union and its hypertechnology. Unwilling Sleepers, Reality Deviants, and agents who appear to have broken their initial Conditioning all receive a drastic program: PsychOps place such people into complete isolation within a heavily controlled environment, then begin performing elaborate psychological treatment, invasive Mind Procedures, and perhaps worse. (See the **Chapter Five** entry regarding ***Room 101***.)

- **Teaming Up:** In most cases, Social Conditioning is a group effort. For details, see ***Acting in Concert***, p. 542.
- **Sleeper Cults:** A dedicated group of unEnlightened Sleepers could also try to instill a weaker version of Social Conditioning. In this case, the dice pool comes from the cult leader's Charisma + an appropriate Ability (Belief Systems, Esoterica, Expression, Politics, Seduction, etc.), and the difficulty for the roll is the target's Willpower + 5. Other rolls, however, can lower the initial difficulty – see ***Enhanced Conditioning***, below. If that first attempt fails, however, then the dice pool for subsequent attempts at Conditioning may come *only* from additional enhanced conditioning attempts... and those put the cult at risk for kidnapping charges, and possibly worse.
- **Initial Processing:** System-wise, Social Conditioning involves a Mind 3/ Prime 2 Effect. The agent(s) behind the Conditioning use their Enlightenment (Arete) against a difficulty of target's Willpower + 3. Each success eliminates one point of the subject's temporary Willpower. If the roll fails, then the Processing may continue, but at +1 difficulty for each subsequent attempt. A botch foils the Processing forever.

  Once the subject's Willpower has been temporarily eliminated, he reaches the first level of Conditioning. For a willing character, that's the end of the story. Initial Processing wins him over to the cause. If he's *not* willing, however, or if the PsychOps want to instill major Conditioning, then the process continues...
- **Reinforcing the Programming:** From there, the Conditioning agents continue the program, often with Mind 4 instead of Mind 3. For Technocratic PsychOps, each roll reflects one day of that process. For non-Technocrat Nephandi, each roll reflects two days; for other groups, each roll reflects a week.

  Each level of Conditioning beyond the first requires one success on an extended and resisted roll, difficulty 6; the PsychOps agents continue to use their Enlightenment, and the player under Conditioning rolls his permanent Willpower. The contest reflects the struggle between the target's subconscious will and the PsychOps' skill at breaking through such obstacles.
- **Enhanced Conditioning:** PsychOps excel at both the carrot and the stick. To reflect the various methods of encouragement, the PsychOps can use mundane Attribute + Ability rolls to lower the difficulty of that extended roll. Social graces could involve persuasion, seduction, eloquence, and other soft techniques, and brutal methods could involve intimidation, beatings, sensory deprivation, and other forms of torture.

- **"Resistance is Futile!":** The subject can also try to resist the Conditioning; for details, see the entries for ***Resisting*** and ***Torture*** in **Chapter Nine**'s ***Dramatic Feats*** section. If the player succeeds, he manages to fight off the programming for the period covered by that roll; if he botches, he breaks. **(See *Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*, p. 407.)**

If any of the PsychOps botch a Conditioning roll, the subject *cannot* be Conditioned... only eliminated.

Breaking Conditioning

Social Conditioning doesn't have to become permanent. Certain Technocratic groups – notably the Friends of Courage, the Harbingers of Avalon, Project Invictus, and many Void Engineer groups – specialize in breaking such Conditioning.

- **Individual Resistance:** If the character strives to break free, the player can spend a point of Willpower, then either roll her current Willpower (difficulty is the level of Conditioning) or perform a successful Mind 3 Effect upon herself. Each success eliminates one level of Conditioning for that scene; five successes or more breaks it for good.

- **Reconditioning:** Another group that understands Social Conditioning techniques can overwrite the previous Conditioning with their own. Again, each success replaces one level of Conditioning with that group's own Conditioning. If, for example, the Friends of Courage overwrite a Black Suit's programming, that Black Suit becomes equally loyal to the Friends of Courage. That's a good thing if the group behind the reconditioning process happens to be the Friends of Courage... and a really *bad* thing if it happens to be a Nephandic infiltration sect!

Mystic Spells and Traditional Rotes

In the more traditional applications of the Arts, magick remains unashamed of its reality-bending nature. A mystic practitioner doesn't have to stage mind games with himself in order to justify what he does – he simply does it. Still, there's a lot to be learned from those who have done such things before. And so, the various Awakened factions share spells, rotes, and rituals that help a mage accomplish various feats, from growing talons to saving data that appeared to be lost.

Unlike Technocratic Adjustments and Procedures, the following rotes appear to be exactly what they are: acts of magick. Although certain spells are more subtle than others, they tend to be vulgar magick in most regions of the modern world, unless they're focused through technology or concealed within apparently mundane activities. Still, the mages who employ them remain proud of such legacies. After all, if you're gonna be a mage, then you might as well indulge yourself and enjoy the magic!

The Bullet-Catch
(•• Forces/ •• Life/ •• Time)

For masters of the martial arts, the ability to catch an arrow, knife, or spear in flight provides a legendary measure of practical skill. No one can catch bullets that way, though... or can they? The Akashic Tradition, of course, refined such techniques back when the Five Metal Dragons brought their hated firearms to the battlefields of China. And although the velocity and stopping power of such weapons has increased geometrically since those early innovations, *anything* is possible with a sufficient understanding of the Way.

System: By adding a Forces 2/ Life 2/ Time 2 Effect to the ***Arrow Cutting*** feat **(see Chapter Nine, p. 428)**, a Tao-shih can indeed catch bullets. Forces slows the bullet's kinetic energy, Life hardens the skin against the projectile, and Time quickens the character's reflexes to incredible speed.

To perform such feats, an Akashic mage who's aware of the attack can cast the Effect, focus it through Do, and then roll his Dexterity + Do as if it were a dodge against the gunfire. If he scores more successes than his attacker, he catches the bullets before they can hit him. Whether or not this stunt is vulgar magick depends on where the martial artist is at the time. Although it would be vulgar in most places, it might be considered coincidental in regions that accept a superhuman martial-arts paradigm.

Awaken the Inanimate
(••• Spirit)

Our world is innately alive. This animistic viewpoint – an intrinsic part of shamanic practices – asserts that every object, place, or being has a spiritual element within itself. Most sprits slumber peacefully, dimly aware of their surroundings but more or less inert. An animist, however, can wake them up, granting fresh vitality to supposedly inanimate things.

As mentioned in the **Chapter Nine** sections about ***Awakening Substances*** see **(p. 443)**, an awakened object works better than a normal, sleeping one. An awakened computer works faster and more efficiently; an awakened glass makes its drinks taste sweeter; an awakened car might literally go that extra mile if you treat it well, and so an animist knows how to get a little extra edge out of essentially material things.

Obviously, a mage wants to get on that spirit's good side. To do so, she talks to it, chants while holding it, polishes it or tinkers with it or does whatever else the object in question might need in order to feel recognized. Maybe she reads her favorite book by candlelight to awaken the spirit within its pages, or she might clean a mirror while asking respectful questions about what it sees. In time, a favored object learns to recognize the mage and begins giving her small favors in return. A happy dagger might never cut its owner; a favorite sweater might look good and feel right and never snag or tear. Although most of these favors remain small and coincidental, a powerful shaman can rouse the spirits to perform clearly impossible acts: offering advice, running without fuel, locking

out trespassers who try to break into an awakened house, and other sorts of paranormal phenomena.

Awakened objects also have presence within the spiritual realm. An awakened knife, for example, can slice ephemera and accompany its mage into the Otherworlds. An awakened house retains its material substance on the other side of the Gauntlet, and it might even have a lower Gauntlet than the area around that house. (Storyteller's option, unless the mage uses Spirit 4 to lower the Gauntlet herself.) A favored toy might glow in the Umbra... or perhaps even speak to the mage. In all cases, the awakened object or area has a stronger Resonance than an object or area that remains asleep.

System: Rousing an object typically requires an extended ritual – five successes or so for small objects, 20 or more for large areas or complicated machines. In most cases, the mage invests that object or place with her own Resonance, literally giving the spirit a part of herself. Typically, this spell remains coincidental. If the mage tries to rouse that spirit to do obviously uncanny things, however, then the Storyteller may decide that she's invoking vulgar magick instead. As noted above, an awakened object exists in the Umbra as well as in the physical world and can be taken along with the mage if and when she travels into the Otherworlds.

Chain of Whispers
(••• Mind/ •• Correspondence)

A few words in the right ears (or the wrong ones) can change a person's world. Hailing from the courtly intrigues of Renaissance Europe, this enchantment turns a simple rumor into a force of social destruction.

To begin the spell, the mage tells something (true or otherwise) to a "trusted friend." Whatever that secret might be, its nature is innately scandalous. Although the spell caster begs her friend not to let that information slip, the spell actually compels the friend to pass the secret on to someone else... who tells someone *else*... who tells someone *else*... and so on, and so on, and so on...

System: Playing off the perverse urge to do forbidden things, this **Chain of Whispers** wraps the desired message in a magickal compulsion to share that secret freely. Mind implants the compulsion to spread the word, and Correspondence pulls the information from person to person; once that secret has been told, the urge to pass it on goes to the next person in the chain. Each success rolled compels two people to share the information... but after that, the natural human tendency to gossip keeps the secret in circulation long after the spell itself has faded.

In its original form, the **Chain of Whispers** required human speech and personal contact; these days, though, a phone call, text message, or Internet post can pass the word along. Mass media spreads gossip around as well, but the forbidden nature of the spell loses its potency when too many people get the message quickly. Unless the secret is clearly ridiculous and easily disproved, this spell remains coincidental. A character can resist the urge to pass it on (a simple Willpower roll would be sufficient), but because so many people love great dirt, most folks won't even *bother* trying to keep their mouths shut.

Penny Dreadful's Bright New Penny
(••• or •••• Matter/ •• Prime/ •• Time)

Crafted by the notorious Penny Dreadful, this spell restores old rubbish to its original, pristine state. By recalling bits of trash as the useful things they had once been, the mage returns the old items to their original splendor.

In its earliest versions, this "bright new penny" trick used an antique tablecloth to conjure food and vintage place settings from the memories of meals that had previously been served upon that tablecloth. As impressive as it was, however, this application proved to be a magnet for Paradox. Later on, Penny created a more coincidental version of the spell that helped her find perfectly preserved antiques in the strangest of places. Since then, it has become a fixture of Hollowers' enchantment and street-orphans' survival tactics.

System: Using Time and Matter, the mage looks backward to the item's original form. Prime energy fuels the new Pattern, and Matter 3 restores the object to its pristine condition. Matter 4 recreates it from scratch. Simple, battered items are easy to repair, but elaborate restorations or fresh conjurations require three successes or more.

As noted earlier, this spell can be either vulgar or coincidental, depending upon how the mage decides to reveal its effects. For suggestions about the line between "*Wow – where'd THAT come from?*" and "*Seriously – where DID that come from?*" check out ***Axis of Coincidence,*** pp. 533-534.

Psychic Interface
(••• or •••• Mind/ •• Data/ •• Forces; possibly with •• Spirit instead of Data)

A specialty of certain Virtual Adepts, Black Suits, cyber-shamans, tech-savvy Hermetics, and the mysterious Mirainohmen, the discipline of psychic interface allows a reality hacker to manipulate computer-based information with his mind alone. Entering a light trance, he focuses on his vision of the data stream or reality code (essentially tapping into the Matrix through psychic contact or brain/ computer interface) and begins to work with the code. By successfully doing so, he can access and alter information, control IT-based systems, surge or short out the electrical impulses of a computer-based network, and possibly – if his psychic bond comes by way of computer spirits – commune with entities composed of raw information.

System: Practically speaking, the psychic interface lets computer-savvy mages access computers without actually using their hardware. Focus-wise, a mage with this discipline (strictly speaking, it's not a rote) can add ***meditation*** to his selection of instruments and then use it in place of ***computers and IT gear***. Most Technocrats still employ tech-based instruments (implants, Glass-tech, or similar contraptions) in order to focus her psychic interface, although practitioners of the ***cybernetics*** practice can simply commune with The Machine. Tech-smart

mystics can meditate their way into the Computer Mind as well, whereas technoshamans bargain with the spirits, employ IT-based rituals, access a specifically dedicated computer system (in game terms, a unique and personalized instrument) from a distance, or otherwise use Spirit Sphere magick instead of the Mind Sphere.

The Data Sphere is essential for this kind of interface; mere Correspondence lacks the essential ties to the essence of computerized reality. The Mind Sphere, meanwhile, projects the mage's consciousness into the Computer Mind. The Forces Sphere allows that character to manipulate electrical systems from a distance, and the higher-level Mind 4 variant lets him project himself into the Digital Web without using hardware to do so.

In order to employ this discipline, a character *must* have at least four dots in Computers, a specialty in Psychic Interface, and at least three dots in Meditation. Whether such access is coincidental or vulgar depends upon what the mage does with it. Simply linking yourself into a computer system from a distance so you can scan or hack its information is essentially invisible, and is thus coincidental. Staring at a computer from across a room and making it print up documents or explode would be vulgar anywhere outside of a dedicated Technocratic facility or other computer-mage stronghold, although obviously body-based interface technology (like a smart phone or Google Glass) would probably pass for coincidence in a tech-savvy region. Downloading yourself into the Digital Web is vulgar to begin with, and communing with tech-spirits would look, if nothing else, really fucking weird.

Talons

(••• or •••• Life; possibly with •• Matter, •• Prime, or both added)

Humans are such soft and fragile things, lacking the claws that distinguish other predators. Thanks to magick, however – or to cybernetic technomagick, anyway – a mage can grow claws (or, with Life 4, install them on another character) that make up for that silly lapse in "intelligent design."

In its simplest and most traditional form, this spell extends the bones within the subject's fingers, and perhaps his toes as well. Strengthening them into practical talons, the mage charges them with personal Quintessence, granting those claws a paranormal sharpness. Other applications graft steel, bone, or other substances into the subject's limbs. Cyborgs, shapechangers, war wizards, and other combative types make deadly use of such appendages, and although the spell's roots are rather primordial, its effects never go out of style.

System: Life 3 grows the claws on the mage's own hands, and Life 4 allows him to grow them on – or attach them to – another character. Matter 2 allows the claw-crafter to work other substances into those **Talons**... an essential element for cybernetic enhancement. Prime toughens and charges the claws, often with a glowing nimbus of Quintessential power

if the mage wants to show off his handiwork. Normally, the claws inflict lethal damage; the Prime 2 component makes this damage aggravated instead. In all cases, this rote allows the character to use the ***Claw*** maneuver described in **Chapter Nine**'s ***Combat*** section.

Witch's Vengeance
(•••• Entropy, ••• Life/ ••• Time, or all three; usually with Correspondence or Data added)

The fearsome powers of a furious witch manifest in this ancient war-spell. Crafting an elaborate poppet, painting, or other image of her victim, the spell caster mutters maledictions at that person, establishes a bond between the image and the real-life target, and then tears into the image, burns it, melts it, or does some other horrible thing to that stand-in for her victim. Meanwhile, the victim suffers crippling pains, catches fire, withers into a skeletal mass, watches as his skin peels off in strips, or otherwise endures a theatrically awful fate.

Despite its witchy name, this spell has many cultural variations: the curses of angry shamans, furious clergy, mystic assassins, Romani elders, techno-punks, bitter artists, and other folks who have a literal bone to pick with their victims. A frightening Data-based variant, **Ticktock Man**, allows a distant technomancer to age his victim from a distance. So long as he holds a bit of that target's personal information and has the requisite amount of dots in Data (Correspondence), the mage can input a number of years into his Trinary computer, get a fix on his target, and then use Life and Time to age his target from a distance.

System: Different Spheres inflict different sorts of harm. Entropy corrupts the victim with age or leprosy, Life demolishes the victim's body in any number of horrifying ways, and Time (combined with Life) lets the attacker age her target according to the ***Feats of Time Magick chart***. Unless the mage employs the Correspondence Sphere (and has at least one dot for every dot in the damage-causing Sphere), she must touch the victim in order to set the curse in motion. All of these attacks, of course, are incredibly vulgar, but they can be alarming for really obvious reasons.

The Notorious Vampiric Lawn Chair
(••••• Life/ ••••• Matter)

A feat more spoken of than actually performed (if only because so few mages have Mastered Life and Matter well enough to enact such radical transformations of both), this legendary spell transforms a dreaded undead entity into domestic furniture. Variations include soap bubbles, trees, household pets, and – in one infamous urban legend – a bag of flaming poo. Despite such rumors, though, the realities involved in this sort of metamorphosis make the idea more theoretical than practical.

According to rumors, both Caeron Mustai and his arch-rival Porthos Fitz-Empress had several pieces of Kindred kindling in their studies, although this seems unlikely, given the risk of said furniture turning back into vampires at inopportune times. Certain vampires have claimed – rightly or wrongly – that mages turned them into chairs and other inanimate objects... typically using that claim to justify the nightmarish fates they inflicted upon those mages afterward. It was speculated that the *Massasa* Wars were sparked by such disgraceful transformations... and in at least one verified case, that speculation is true. The vengeance worked upon the Hermetic Master in question – who dared to turn a flesh-crafting Tzimisce into a commode – remains an object lesson for mages with more skill than sense.

System: Seriously, this is a truly stupid spell. No mage with the Sphere aptitude and Arete to perform it is likely to ignore the many complications involved in such a prank – to wit:

- It's vulgar. *Really* vulgar. As in, *there is no way to possibly justify this by paradigm*-level vulgar. Paradox is inevitable.
- It's got to overcome the innate resistance a vampire has to such spells. **(See *Night-Folk Counterspelling*, p. 546.)**
- It must inflict enough successes, after countermagick, to bring that vampire from full strength to Incapacitated. For a young vampire, that would demand at least four successes (eight health levels); the same feat might demand five, six, or even more successes if the mage is trying to convert an elder Kindred.
- If you're using the divided successes option, then the player must devote at least that many successes to the transformation damage. That means that a four-success roll will change the vampire into a lawn chair for one turn. After that, the lawn chair becomes a vampire again – and the mage had better have a good escape spell handy at that point, or his name becomes "blood bag."
- In order to effect a lasting transformation, the player must either spend or roll additional successes, as shown on the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***. Turning a young vampire into a chair for one day, for instance, would require at least seven successes.
- Tuning an undead vampire into some other form of inert material demands Matter 5. "Vampire" is not listed on the Periodic Table of Elements, so transforming that substance into different forms of matter requires full Mastery of that Sphere.
- Vampires with the Protean and Vicissitude Disciplines can transform back to their original form with very little trouble. The vampire must spend one Blood Point for each success the mage rolled. Every point negates one success on the Arete roll, and the vampire changes back when those successes are all negated.
- The transformed vampire is still a *vampire*, and that vampire remains conscious. Said vampire may use any Discipline that doesn't require moving her limbs. If the

bloodsucker has minions within summoning distance, things might go rather poorly for the mage.

- A Kindred on the receiving end of this spell – whether or not the spell succeeds – must make a Frenzy roll at difficulty 8 (outright humiliation, plus dire peril). For players unfamiliar with **Vampire: The Masquerade**, this means that the vampire will flip her shit unless she makes a successful roll, and anyone within reach will become wallpaper in very short order.

- A vampire who gets turned into wooden furniture may be set on fire, for the usual amount of damage. If the spell lasts long enough, that vampire might be left out in the sun, again taking the usual amount of damage each turn. That burning Kindred automatically goes into frenzy and may immediately change back into her normal form by expending her entire blood pool, assuming that she has enough blood left to do so. If not, she burns.

- Vampires hold immortal grudges. Any mage who transforms a Kindred into furniture will be *blood-hunted* by that vampire, her allies, and probably other vampires as well. (A blood-hunt, for non-**Vampire** players, is essentially a zero-mercy undead APB.) After all, examples must be made, lest other mages get the wrong idea.

- *When*, not if, those hunters find the mage, their revenge will be as gorily theatrical as possible... and when it comes to gory theatrics, it's hard to beat an angry vampire!

Any mage dumb enough to brag about doing this sort of thing (whether he can actually do it or not) deserves his impending sadistic demise.

Part IX: Reality Zones

Clearly, people *do* believe in magic.

Oh, the party line about technology ruling the world is popular enough. And there *is* truth to it. But people still believe in magic. Maybe they call it "miracles," or "god," or simply read about it in the pages of this month's best-seller or their favorite website... but they *DO* believe. And so, the Technocracy isn't the only group that holds sway over the Consensus of mortal faith.

As it says in **Mage 2nd Edition**, magick is never "just part of the landscape." Although it might seem more rigid at certain times and places than at others, one fact every mage understands is that reality is never fixed into a certain form. Although the mystics of the early **Revised Edition** era felt a profound crisis of faith and feared that magick is dead, the truth of Awakening allows every mage to rework reality to a certain degree. The boundaries of coincidence show just how much flexibility a given region of reality can bear. And within certain reality zones, some types of magick are more coincidental than others.

Options for Reality

Like many other elements of **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition**, the reality-zones concept is optional:

- Your group could use it to determine the sorts of Effects and practices that are coincidental or vulgar;

- You might simply ignore it and assume that the entire world operates under Technocratic Reality;

- ...or you could deepen the game and allow your players to change their world by creating paradigm shifts that, in turn, alter capital-R Reality and literally change the rules in their favor.

The choice between those options, ultimately, is yours.

Reality Zones Within the Game

Simply put, magickal Effects that fit a place or culture work better than ones that go against its grain. If Jodi Blake wants to incite mass murder, for example, she'll have an easier time doing that at a protest rally than at a Buddhist temple.

In game terms, a reality zone affects a mage in one of two different ways:

- **Acceptance:** Effects and practices that fit in with a reality zone are usually coincidental and might – at the Storyteller's option – lower the difficulty by -1 if the Effect or practice suits the tone of that area. (See ***Appropriate Resonance*** on the ***Magickal Difficulty Modifiers chart***.)

- **Rejection:** Effects and practices that clash with a reality zone tend to be vulgar and might add +1 to their difficulty if they go against the local atmosphere. (See ***Opposed Resonance*** on that same chart.)

What does that mean? Simple: if your beliefs and actions suit a reality zone, that zone accepts your magick; if you go against the grain, the local reality rejects you.

In short, it's easier to work with Reality than to go against the flow. And if you want to change things, then that task is easier if you work with what you have than it is to force your Will down Reality's throat.

Working in the Zone

From a game and story standpoint, reality zones encourage players and their characters to be clever and resourceful – to

Example: Jodi's Riot

Working within a reality zone involves imagination, observation, and strategy. In game terms, it's an excellent opportunity to put Traits like Academics, Belief Systems, Esoterica, Media, or Politics to good use.

For an example, let's take Jodi's would-be riot. If the Nephandus comes flying in on a demon, eating babies and throwing blood on the crowd, she's being ridiculously vulgar. Reality will smack her first, and the Sleepers will probably stomp her afterward. Nowhere on Earth is that kind of shit okay.

So let's say she's in a *Technocratic Reality zone*. Picking her tactics carefully, Jodi ingratiates herself with several influential people, seduces them with subtle Mind Effects, and then grabs a bullhorn and begins to work the crowd. Choosing a particularly angry pack of protesters, she shouts slogans that match their frustrations. Because dominion is Jodi's favored practice, she uses some tools of that practice (eye contact, group rites, social domination, voice) to focus some large-scale – yet still subtle – Life and Mind Effects that push everyone over the edge. A few minutes later, violence explodes and Jodi's work is done. No one has seen her perform a single act of magick, and the resulting violence is absolutely coincidental.

In a *Localized Reality zone*, she'd choose tactics that suit the beliefs of folks nearby. Say she's in a Buddhist temple, a zone of harmonic energies and social stability, based around beliefs of disconnection and personal discipline. Starting a riot here will be more difficult... so instead of tossing around blood and fury, she begins playing upon the insecurities, fears, and repressions within the temple community. A little Life-Mind sexual temptation, a few distracting thoughts placed in various people's heads, maybe a touch of Matter when no one is looking, to warp the temple's bell chimes into discordant, irritating sounds. And then, she plants the scapegoat: a would-be lover, a bumbling initiate, the person who doesn't fit in, or the local folks who live outside the temple. Maybe she steals something or kills someone, pointing evidence toward the scapegoat. A few Mind-pushes here and there, and soon the harmonious monks are shedding blood. Again, the Nephandus triumphs without ever showing her hand.

In a *Primal Reality zone*, Jodi sets herself up as an old-fashioned sorceress. Conducting her usual seductions through sex-and-blood rituals, she ingratiates herself into a local community. The Old Gods must be placated, so Jodi blends her maleficia practice with the same sort of domination she used in the other examples. Now, though, she invokes those Old Gods, offers traditional sacrifices, and shows her worthiness by pitting herself against the elements through ordeals and vision questing. Perhaps with the help of malignant spirits, or simply through the usual seductions, she manages to turn the community against itself. Once again, though, her Arts and tactics follow the set of reality. Instead of shouting through a bullhorn or warping temple bells, she's sacrificing doves and watering the soil with blood.

One mage, one goal, three approaches. All of them can either work or fail, depending upon how they're done.

work within the zone rather than to fight the program and probably lose.

The sections below offer four essential reality zones:

- **Earthly Foundations:** Certain laws of Earth's reality physics are more or less fixed. You *can* go against them, but no matter who you are or what you do, those efforts will almost certainly count as vulgar magick.
- **Technocratic Reality:** Here, the laws of scientific technology dictate what is and is not acceptable within the zone.
- **Localized Reality:** In certain flexible areas, reality depends more upon specific local beliefs than on a rigid set of rules.
- **Primal Reality:** Technology holds little influence in Primal Reality places. The laws of mystic Old Ways still dominate what is and is not possible.

In game terms, a given zone either accepts or rejects a mage's activities. The more she can play within the rules of a zone, the more successful she will be.

Earthly Foundations

Some things are almost always vulgar, no matter *who's* doing them, *where* they're doing them, or *how* they're being done. In game terms, acts that violate these Earthly Foundations contradict the baseline reality for Earth.

- **Sudden Large Alterations of Physical and Metaphysical Mass or Space:** Stacking places on top of one another, disintegrating large structures, changing large masses of physical matter into large emissions of energy (i.e., explosions), radical transformations of one physical form into another (that is, people into stone or vampires into lawn chairs)... such things disrupt Reality on a fundamental level. Even when performed by technology, such large-scale alterations are never truly safe. The horrific consequences of nuclear detonation could be seen as manifestations of the Paradox Effect; so could environmental pollution, climate change, organ rejection, electromagnetic pulses, cancer, and other aftershocks of technological disruption. The bigger the Effect, the larger the consequences... and no matter who you are or how you work your magicks, no mage acts without consequences.

- **Obvious violations of normal physical laws:** Water running uphill, people flying around, free-floating molecules abruptly manifesting as solid mass, turtles suddenly moving at cheetah speed... such gross alterations of Earth's primary physical laws tend to incur Paradox. Certain long-term projects – like airplanes, flying ointments, and martial arts – might be able to bend those principles a bit, but the act of investing that much time, energy, and devotion to a task still recognizes that those principles exist. Simply ignoring them – say, by jumping off a roof while believing you can fly – is a good way to get your ass kicked, either by Paradox (if you *do* fly) or by physics (if you don't).

- **Cross-dimensional rifts:** Whether you see the Gauntlet as a spiritual barrier or the membrane between dimensional spaces, it clearly exists for a reason. When folks go through it, Reality responds. The Avatar Storm metaplot could be seen as one huge Paradox backlash – one so vast that every mage alive felt the shock. Even if the Avatar Storm never happened in your chronicle, it's a slap in the face to Reality at large when a person opens gates between the worlds.

- **Messing with the time stream:** Although *perceptions* of time are fluid (a fact that allows mages to peer backwards or forwards through time), the actual *actions* that occur in time cannot be altered easily. Time-trained mages know that such alterations *are* possible, but those actions are never coincidental unless Reality itself performs them... and even *then*, there are consequences from that alteration.

Technocratic Reality

Throughout our world in this 21st century, the Technocratic vision of reality holds the coincidental edge, not simply because of the Union's indoctrination (although that *does* have something to do with it) but because science-based technology is rooted in following the laws of Earthly physics. Unlike faith and magic, it's based upon repeatable, verifiable, consistent results, not mere Enlightened Will, so it tends to work more reliably than mystic magick does.

Note that mystics can, and do, use technological tools in their practices. A wizard can use a cell phone, and a shaman can mow his lawn. Although hardcore primitivists reject all but the simplest technologies, most 21st-century mystics accept Technocratic Reality by default. (Whether that's a result of brainwashing or practicality is a subject for lively debate...)

The Industrialized World: Science-based technology has made the world into a better place for most human beings. Central heating, advanced medicine, info tech, toilet paper... the Masses really *are* better off now than they were during the High Mythic Age. And so, as a result, people have faith in the blessings of technology – not just in the devices and Procedures

of the Technocracy, but in everyday miracles like cars, soap, and running water.

Thanks to those factors – as well as the large-scale paradigm enforcement on the part of the Order of Reason and its various descendants – the majority of the industrialized world accepts miraculous technology as coincidence. A jetpack will get your mage further than a broomstick will, and guns can do what wands cannot. Mystic Effects, then, have distinct disadvantages when it comes to getting away with magick.

Scientific and Technological Installations: In places dedicated to technology, that technology reigns supreme. Even the weird science of the Etherites and Adepts dominates coincidence in the labs and workshops devoted to those pursuits. Mystic magick is almost always vulgar in such places, and even the more extreme forms of technomagick could be considered vulgar if they contradicted the purposes of a specific laboratory. A HIT Mark at MIT would attract the wrong sort of attention from the thousands of students and faculty members who realize just how impossible such technologies are in their reality. So when you're trying to figure out the edge between coincidence and vulgarity near a science lab, ask yourself *whose* version of science dominates the localized belief. After all, the paradigm difference between Arkham University and UCLA is pretty damned big.

Localized Reality

Despite the apparent laws of physics, Reality often *is* fundamentally irrational. Vampires, spirits, gods, and magick did not simply fade away because a few textbooks overruled their existence. Certain things can never be quantified or proven, so large portions of the material world remain in an *either/or* state, with malleable reality and greater margins for coincidence.

Game-wise, the following contested territories have more flexibility with regards to mystic practices and miracles of faith. Technology, on the other hand, might be considered more vulgar in certain areas; a haunted house, for instance, could throw Paradox at technomagick and accept witchcraft as perfectly normal.

Localized realities extend from small areas (a house, a field, an underpass) to communities of several hundred people (a small town) or areas of several dozen miles. Higher populations – or really *low* ones – tend to lead a localized reality toward either Primal or Technocratic extremes. This *localized reality syndrome* allows mages to create Sanctums and Chantries, whereas Sleepers spread faiths, build churches, maintain cultural traditions, and use art, education, and technology to change their world in small yet significant ways.

Urban Decay: When Entropy settles into the cracks of man's creativity, the apparent solidity of tech-based reality breaks down. Slums, ruins, abandoned factories, derelict homes, disaster areas, urban warzones, the old parts of town... anyone who spends time in such areas realizes how precarious reality can be. Even the biggest, most modern cities on Earth have places where a shaman, houngan, priest, or witch can still get the Old Ways to work despite the laws of scientific technology.

Irrationality Zones: That's even more true in places where rationality fades: haunted houses, sacred spaces, holy lands, SF conventions, religious revivals, battlegrounds, murder sites... places where the reasonable façade of scientific progress gives way to primal chaos or counter-rationality. In such *irrationality zones*, mystic Arts and outrageous coincidences have the upper hand over science-based technologies.

The Technocracy isn't blind to this effect... and has, in fact, taken it into account. One of the reasons that flamboyant cyborgs and Men in Black make such effective agents in such places is because those figures hold archetypal powers that go beyond mere science. The Black Suits, in particular, share a symbolic mystique that puts them far outside the bounds of rational technology and into the realm of myth. The apparently supernatural techniques of such agents remain coincidental in certain types of irrationality zones. After all, those agents are essentially walking legends with their own sorts of magick to command.

Unlike the ***Mystic Regions*** mentioned below, an irrationality zone can be wildly *scientific* too. A steampunk workshop or robotics lab could seem so counter-rational that it shuts down both magick *and* conventional scientific principles. On a related note, that irrationality might bring down a curtain of disbelief so thick that the people inside it refuse to accept anything outside their chosen view, even when a rational person would admit the evidence of her senses. **(For details, see *Types of Quiet: Denial*, pp. 557-558.)**

Borderlands and Crossings: Certain times and places slip between the rational and irrational worlds. Crossroads, holidays, dawn and dusk, the edge of a forest, mirrors, fogs, cliffs or caves, even the threshold of a house – they're transitions between states of being. For mages who understand them, such places can be avenues for coincidence as well. A witch at midnight on Halloween, for example, can get away with things that Paradox would strike her down for doing in broad daylight on either side of that holiday. A Storyteller may consider certain thresholds in time and space to be more open to coincidence than usual.

Rural Areas: The further you get from the big city, the more primal and irrational the world appears to become. Farmlands, frontiers, distant houses, small towns in the middle of nowhere... such places tend to follow the rules of the people who live there. And if those people believe in ghosts or miracles or Babe the Blue Ox, well, then the local reality will probably accommodate that view of the world. The big-city stranger with his cell phone and Internet might just find that those things don't work 'round here; meanwhile, the faith-healing preacher-man really *can* perform miracles when he acts according to God's Will. For that reason, among others, mystic mages often move to rural areas where the culture suits their own beliefs.

Regions of Faith: The greatest showdown of the 21st century isn't the battle between magick and technology but the divide between religious faith and material rationalism. In this fight, the boundaries of coincidence and vulgar magick depend less upon whether or not something is "magical" than upon whether or not people accept it within their religious views. People all over this world can, and do, accept fundamentally (and fundamentalist) irrational ideas that contradict pure science.

And so, a mage who shares the dominant culture's faith has an edge over one who does not.

The Digital Web: Although it's not the wild-west zone it once was, the Digital Web still features a dynamic flux of tech and magick. As the section in **Chapter Nine** explains, the Web considers certain types of Effects and practices to be perfectly normal, whereas it shuts down other kinds of magick with Whiteouts and other quirks. No one truly owns Web-based reality, though lots of people still like to think they do. In truth, the Web is very much its own universe, with laws and principles that apply only within its expanse.

High-Resonance/ Synergy Zones: Certain places have a different "feel" than others. For various reasons, such places have a type of energy about them. Las Vegas has a high-roller atmosphere that encourages risks and excess; Auschwitz holds a misery that every living thing can feel. The ***Resonance and Synergy*** sidebar describes various types of Resonance and Synergy that a mage can either use or contradict. As mentioned above, a player who works with that energy will have an easier time than one who goes against it.

Realms: Each Realm is a reality unto itself. The physics of one Realm might differ considerably from the principles of other Realms, each Realm following the essence of its specific place. A Chinese Hell, an animistic Nature Realm, the Machine-Haven Autocthonia, and the Umbral Realm of Forces all run by very different rules, and none of them bears much resemblance to Earth's reality.

That's all especially true of Horizon Realms – places specifically created by mages to suit a particular paradigm. The Hermetic stronghold Doissetep obviously favored Hermetic Arts; the Copernicus Research Center catered almost exclusively to Void Engineer techniques. Within those regions, reality is what its creators make it to be, accepting and rejecting magicks according to those creators' wishes. Opposing magicks are almost always vulgar, and the appropriate Arts remain coincidental.

Realms also tend to reflect a lot of Resonance, echoing the deeds and natures of their primary inhabitants. In addition to the reality-zoning that makes rival forms of magick vulgar, trespassers also find that their magick is more difficult to cast in such places. A Man in Black, for example, would be operating at a disadvantage in a Cult of Ecstasy Horizon Realm like the Balador Pleasure Dome; even if his Mind-based Procedures are essentially coincidental, his Authoritarian Resonance goes against the spirit of that place. As described above, folks who go against the flow suffer penalties, whereas those who go *with* it reduce the difficulties for their Effects.

Primal Reality

Some regions never fell to Technocratic domination. In such places, mystic Arts still have the edge, and technomagick tends to be vulgar if it works at all. Primal mages insist that Earth has always been this way, and they might be correct. The shadow realm of legends and dreams certainly favors this primal atmosphere.

Mystic Regions: In certain pockets of the 21st-century world, faith holds more sway than science. Within such places, a person whose practices match the local beliefs is usually coincidental as far as Reality is concerned, whereas anyone whose practices clash with – or simply don't feature into – those beliefs is considered vulgar.

Despite common preconceptions, those locations don't have to be "in the deepest heart of Africa" or other ethnocentric nonsense. Certain segments of small-town Americana, hippie communes, counterculture festivals, even high-tech steampunk groups or transhumanist enclaves could all be considered mystic regions too. It's mostly a matter of shared culture and belief – a belief so strong that it reshapes Reality in its own image even without Awakened influence.

Deep Wilderness: True wilderness is hard to find these days, but scraps of it still exist between the cracks of the 21st century. And as anyone who's ever taken a deep-woods hike can attest, things just work *differently* out there. Advanced technology tends to fail in deep-wilderness areas, but the oldest forms of magick thrive. The further a person gets from civilization, the less predictable Reality becomes. Werewolves and other monsters favor such remote locations because the hand of humanity still holds very little power there.

Nodes and Wellsprings: Except for Nodes and Wellsprings that have been dedicated to science or technology, these raw fountains of Quintessential energy favor a primal sort of reality. Although Nodes often count as the ***High Resonance/ Synergy Zones*** described above, the really potent ones – especially werewolf caerns, ancient ruins, and unspoiled glades – reject technology and accept only the Old Ways as coincidental within their area.

The Old Roads: As detailed in **Chapters Four** and **Nine**, the Paths of the Wyck refuse to accept advanced technology. Technomagick simply *doesn't work*, period. Nothing happens. The primal Arts, however, function as well there now as they did 5000 years ago.

The Otherworlds: Aside from a few Realms and regions, the Otherworlds render most forms of technomagick vulgar. The Void Engineers and Society of Ether have spent centuries crafting their exceptional technologies... and even then, the laws of Reality do not favor them. Etherspace – the region between Horizons – seems to enjoy a bit of mad science; *every* form of magick is coincidental there, regardless of its form or practice, although acts that violate the ***Earthly Foundations*** might still become vulgar if the mages get too bold. (*Space travel? Si! Time travel? No!*)

Shifting the Zone

As an *optional rule*, the reality-zone concept can give players and characters something to gain by changing the dominant paradigm. By working to shift the local beliefs – that is, by getting the Sleeping Masses to accept your ideas – you might actually be able to change a reality zone. The core reality zone – *Earthly Foundations* – is almost impossible to move with anything short of vulgar magick. The other three zones, however, are flexible. Significantly dramatic acts within the story can change them. This way, a **Mage** group can join the battle for reality and maybe even win.

Cinematic License

Movies, for many of us, seem real. Sure, they break the laws of reality... and in many cases, we know that they do. Still, they *seem* so real that the 21st-century realm of **Mage** often accepts cinematic reality as coincidental, even when folks know intellectually that things like Terminators or blast pistols can't *possibly* exist... *can* they?

In places where Technocratic Reality determines the boundaries of coincidence, assume that mages can get away with small acts of cinematic license that fit the mode of popular action movies. Outrunning explosions, unexpected meetings, the disappearing Batman trick, fistfights that would put a dozen normal brawlers in the ICU... a movie-savvy mage can pull such stunts and generally expect to get away with them. Even so, technology holds the edge; Sleepers will accept *Fast & Furious* car stunts more easily than they'll accept bullet-time dodges from *The Matrix*.

Gritty fantasy films, SF action thrillers, and superhero movies mark the upper limits of cinematic license in the Technocratic world. The Masses might accept the realistic tone of Chris Nolan's first two *Dark Knight* films, but *Man of Steel* isn't gonna fly, so to speak. Even the more technophilic action flicks, like *Iron Man*, are pushing the bounds of credibility. A mage could get away with riffing on *Casino Royale* or *The Hunger Games*, but she'd best steer clear of *Resident Evil* stunts.

Wild action and obvious fantasy films step way outside the bounds of cinematic credibility. No one accepts stuff like *Lucy* or *Kung Fu Hustle* as coincidental. Although certain localized reality zones might turn a blind eye to *Kill Bill*-level feats, movies like *Inception* or *House of Flying Daggers* are spectacularly vulgar, though really entertaining.

Flipping Zones

Flipping a zone – that is, making a sudden polar shift from Technocratic Reality to Primal Reality – is almost impossible for a small group or single individual. The Technocracy and Traditions have been trying to accomplish such feats for centuries, and neither one has succeeded. Instead, the shifts come about by changing Localized Reality, winning hearts and minds over to a particular cause.

Such shifts have massive repercussions. The gradual shift from Primal to Technocratic realities has involved a gradual process and several catastrophes like the Triangle Trade and both World Wars. A polar shift back to Primal Reality would be even more catastrophic – it would be the sudden collapse of everything we hold to be real... in short, an Apocalypse from which almost nothing from our world remains. That *almost* happened during the Week of Nightmares, but it has not happened yet. And although many mystics speak fondly about such things in an abstract sense, no sane person wants them to happen for real.

(Marauders, of course, are insane by definition... and although the Nephandi might possess some awful form of sanity, it's not one most other people share.)

Localized Shifts

Localized Reality, on the other hand, can be won by people who gain enough influence to shift those local beliefs. In the old days, this generally involved conquering people, either through military domination or cultural assimilation. These days, though, it's easier to win people over by playing to their emotions than it is to beat on them until they do things your way. (See Iraq, Afghanistan, and the USA.)

Mages don't really have the option of conquering the Masses, although some occasionally still try to do so. Instead, Awakened factions influence Sleepers by offering them the reality that those people seem to want. As **Mage Revised** points out, Technocracy Reality holds the upper hand... not because HIT Marks and Black Suits rule the world, but because people would rather have homes and laptops than wizards with funny hats. That apparent victory, though, doesn't look like the Technocratic ideal. By the Union's standards, it's a mess.

Why? Because people are complicated, and so is our reality.

Paradigm Shifts

Under the ***Shifting the Zone*** option, groups of players may achieve influence within a Localized Reality zone. Depending upon the chronicle, they might even expand that influence across *several* zones, gradually tipping the Technocratic or Primal balance in their favor. Doing so, however, should be a *story-based process*, not a dice-rolling contest. After all, if a few dozen successes could dominate Reality, then everyone on Earth would be some Oracle's bitch.

So how *can* a handful of mages begin to turn Localized Reality in their favor? Typically, such paradigm shifts involve winning the Masses over to a certain vision through one or more of the following tactics:

- Make life better for the people, and credit those improvements to your paradigm.
- Make life *worse* for the people, encouraging them to do things your way.
- Blame problems on scapegoats and offer an alternative.
- Give the people something to fear and hate; profit from the results.
- Undermine everything and take advantage of the chaos.
- Offer salvation for the Masses' pain.
- Create or reveal something so impressive and/ or beautiful that the Masses will remember it.
- Present a pleasing alternative to an unpleasant status quo.

- Circulate a meme so compelling that the Masses will embrace it. (See ***Memes*, p. 594.)**
- Present innovations so radical that they accomplish one or more of the other feats. (cf. television, the Internet, nukes, democracy.)

All of the previous examples, incidentally, are based on things that have brought about real-life, real-world paradigm shifts.

Like personal and cultural paradigms, a reality shift must meet the needs of normal people – an elite group of especially *influential* people, perhaps, but still "normal" people who have enough cultural clout to tip the balance of belief in their favor. Concepts like "trickle-down economics," for instance, meet the needs of a small group of people while going against the needs of the Masses, and yet that particular concept maintains a hold upon reality because a lot of people *believe* themselves to be members of that elite group even when facts and evidence suggest otherwise. As the section about ***Creating Other Paradigms*** points out **(see pp. 571-572)**, enduring beliefs follow needs, withstand challenges, and depend upon evidence. If your mages wish to shift the localized reality toward their designs, then they must create a reality that serves people other than themselves.

In game terms, check out ***The Reality Challenge*** in **Chapter Nine** for suggestions about how player characters might bring about a local paradigm shift. Such challenges, after all, are decided by changing the local reality in the Masses' favor.

As a general rule, assume that paradigm shifts come more from social influence and technical or artistic innovations than through beating someone's ass. The idea that overthrowing one reality by force will immediately lead to the reality you prefer is nice in theory... but, as history shows, it never really works that way.

Change the Game and Change Your World

The choice between those options belongs to each individual group and Storyteller. **Mage**, however, has always been dedicated to the idea of transformation. The very first tagline for **Mage** – one that was never actually published and which appeared only on the in-house drafts created by the original authors – was "*A Storytelling game of changing reality*." And although that sentiment lacks the immediacy of **Mage**'s other taglines, the idea that you *CAN* change the world is an essential element of the game.

As Uncle Al said, do what you Will.

Appendix 1: Allies and Antagonists

Fantasy, abandoned by reason, produces impossible monsters.

— Francisco de Goya

Supporting Cast

In the hectic epic of a willworker's life, a host of potential allies and enemies provides the supporting cast. The following templates can fill in Background Traits, inspire characters, answer summonses, punish Paradox backlashes, embody alternate forms, chase your heroes around town, and otherwise keep your **Mage** adventures hopping.

Bestiary

Some mages are urbanites who rarely see anything wilder than a house cat or a pigeon. Others prefer to live in remote wilderness regions, and a few mages use Life Sphere magick to take on the form of animals. Certain Sons of Ether and Progenitors also employ a wide range of experimental beasts – enhancing their intelligence, placing control circuits into their brains, or using drugs and gene therapy to give them new and powerful capabilities. And then you've got ***Familiars*** (as in the Background described in **Chapter Six**), many of which take the form of animals with extraordinary intellect and a few other surprises.

Normal animals have only Physical and Mental Traits, because their Social traits are largely irrelevant for interacting with humans. Few have Intelligence scores higher than 2 or Perception scores lower than 3. Damage inflicted by animals is typically lethal, although the Storyteller may decide that small animals (housecat or small-dog size) inflict bashing damage instead. Medium-size animals (dogs, chimps, wolves, etc.) inflict lethal damage with their teeth and bashing damage with their claws.

For familiars, or manifestations of totem spirits, add one to three dots and dice to the Traits below, plus whatever other Abilities seem appropriate. **(For details about incarnated totem demigods, see *Totem Spirits*, p. 633-636.)**

Alligator

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 3

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 1 (seven soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for seven dice; tail slap for six dice.

Bird, Small (Finch, Sparrow, Pigeon, etc.)

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Expression (Mimicry) 2

Willpower: 1

Health Levels: OK, -1, -5, Dead

Armor Rating: 0 (two soak dice, total)

Attack: Harassment (-1 die on all target's dice pools while being harassed).

Bird, Substantial (Hawk, Raven, Owl, etc.)

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 1 (3 for ravens, crows, and owls), Brawl 2, Intimidation 2

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (two soak dice, total)

Attack: Claw for two dice (bashing); bite for one die (only in desperation).

Bird, Large (Eagle, Swan, Vulture, etc.)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Wings for four dice (bashing); claw for four dice (bashing); bite for two dice (lethal).

Cat, Domestic-Size

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics (Climbing) 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Intimidation 1, Stealth 4

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for one die (bashing); claw for one die (lethal); rake for two dice (lethal) when cornered.

Chimpanzee

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Acrobatics 3, Alertness 3, Athletics (Climbing) 4, Brawl 2, Empathy 1, Intimidation 2

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for five dice; claw for four dice.

Dog, Small (Chihuahua, Pug, etc.)

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Empathy 2, Stealth 2

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (two soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for two dice (lethal).

Dog, Medium (Beagle, Border Collie, etc.)

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Stealth 2, Survival (Tracking) 4

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for three dice (lethal); claw for two dice (bashing).

Dog, Large (German Shepherd, Great Dane, etc.)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 2, Survival (Tracking) 4

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for five dice (lethal); claw for three dice (bashing).

Horse

Attributes: Strength: 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Empathy 2

Willpower: 2

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -3, -3, -3, -5, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 1 (five soak dice, total)

Attack: Trample or kick for six dice (bashing); bite for three (lethal).

Leopard, Jaguar, Panther, or Cougar

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for five dice; claw for five dice (all lethal).

Lynx or Bobcat

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics (Climbing) 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for four dice; claw for three dice; rake for four dice (all lethal).

Tiger or Lion

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Empathy 3, Intimidation 5, Stealth 3

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 1 (five soak dice, total)

Attack: Bite for seven dice; claw for six dice (all lethal).

Wolf

Attributes: Strength 3-4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3-4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2, Survival (Tracking) 4

Willpower: 3

Armor Rating: 0 (three to four soak dice, total)

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for four or five dice (lethal); claw for three or four dice (bashing).

Among the Masses

Even the most reclusive and misanthropic mage occasionally deals with Sleepers. Most Awakened folks live amidst the Masses... and even those who don't do so will eventually wind up interacting with at least a few Sleepers. That's especially true if you've got the Backgrounds ***Allies***, ***Backup***, ***Cult***, ***Retainers***, or ***Spies*** (see **Chapter Six**), which put such characters into your mage's employ. Lab assistants, security guards, toughs, lovers, groupies, acolytes, cultists, converts, and so forth... if and when a group of mages finds itself crossing words or swords with such people, the following templates will come in handy.

Typical Citizen

The average citizen in a non-combat zone has some useful abilities but no fighting skills to speak of. Though scrappy individuals (bullies, hookers, folks with a few self-defense classes under their belts) might have a dot or two in Brawl – perhaps even Firearms or a Martial Art – the typical mortal (as if such a thing exists!) has a professional skill or two, a hobby, and the basic skills necessary to operate household and professional technologies (cars, cell phones, computers, etc.). If that person's an athlete, yoga enthusiast, personal trainer, or so forth, she might have higher Physical Traits than usual. Receptionists, lab assistants, students, informants, reporters, artists, and so forth might be very good at their jobs (Mental Attributes and a professional skill of 3 or higher), but they still tend to make themselves scarce if punches, bullets, or lightning bolts start flying. Most Cultists, Retainers, and low-level Backup personnel (as per those Background Traits) fall into this category.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 1-3, Manipulation 1-3, Appearance 1-4, Perception 1-3, Intelligence 1-4, Wits 2

Suggested Abilities: Area Knowledge 1-3, Athletics 0-2, Crafts 0-3, Computer 1-3, Drive 1-2, Firearms 3, Technology 1-3 (plus Talents, Skills, or Knowledges appropriate to their field or hobby, 1-3)

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Equipment: Wallet, cell phone, typical clothing and gear for the appropriate setting.

Image: This person could be anyone.

Roleplaying Notes: Depending on your motivations, your behavior runs the range of human experience.

Thug

Some folks love to fight. Maybe they're drunken frat guys, obnoxious barflies, furious protesters, boys, women, or men who've got more issues than sense. It's pretty easy to end up on the bad side of such people, especially in the World of Darkness. Cults with particularly shady membership have lots of these sorts of people among the congregation. Although they don't put up much resistance against a stronger foe, thugs can give a mage or two a decently hard time unless that person's got some mad skills on display.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Area Knowledge 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Crafts 2, Drive 1, Intimidation 1, Melee 2, Streetwise 1, Technology 1

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Equipment: Wallet and stuff, improvised weapons (pool cues, broken bottles, tire irons, chairs, protest signs, and so on).

Image: A rough and cocky attitude, perhaps accentuated by a few scars or old injuries, betrays this person's willingness to fight.

Roleplaying Notes: Fighting is a rush. You enjoy it, and you're pretty decent at it, if you must say so yourself!

Beat Cop

In the World of Darkness, most beat cops have seen things they don't understand... but they *also* know that cops who investigate mysterious occurrences too often tend to either vanish or else develop an odd aversion to discussing such events. Instead, police officers tell stories of the strange things they see, then warn each other about the need to report anything *too* strange to the FBI or some similar agency.

Beat cops react to magick very differently, depending upon what they see. Someone who presents the cop with a badge or other ID indicating that she's part of some government or military agency while carrying a device that appears to be a piece of impressively advanced or unlikely technology will be treated with deference and respect. In contrast, most police treat an oddly dressed and obviously eccentric individual who's waving crystals around or gibbering in unknown languages as a threat. Police are likely to arrest, beat, or even shoot such a person, depending upon how threatened the police officer feels and how menacing that individual seems to be.

In recent years, police forces (especially within the United States) have been supplied with military-grade hardware, the training to use it, and the ability to do terrible things with it and get away with them. Because street-level crime rarely demands

armored vehicles and combat-ready troops, those police forces often escalate even the most routine situations to small-scale battle zones. Given the heightened police response to the Occupy demonstrations, the Arab Spring demonstrations, and the Ferguson protests, it's not unreasonable to assume that a clash with beat cops will turn into a local war within hours... if not minutes, especially in the World of Darkness. Mages who want to mess with the cops should expect *very* harsh consequences.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Area Knowledge 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Law 2, Melee 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2, Technology 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Equipment: Badge and ID card, heavy pistol, riot baton, pepper spray, Taser, radio, police uniform. Urban police officers often wear Kevlar vests when expecting trouble. Escalated responses could provide these same cops with riot suits and shields, shotguns or assault rifles, pacification spray, and military vehicles.

Image: Typical beat cops wear the local law-enforcement uniform, carry the essential gear, and share the infamous, wary cop stare that notes small details and brooks no bullshit. SWAT officers and escalated-response teams wear body armor, carry military weapons, and employ brutal, sometimes lethal, tactics.

Roleplaying Notes: You've seen more awful things than you're willing to discuss with anyone outside the Thin Blue Line. Except under the most extreme circumstances, you're loyal to your fellow cops; you might not care for individuals, but only other officers can understand what you go through.

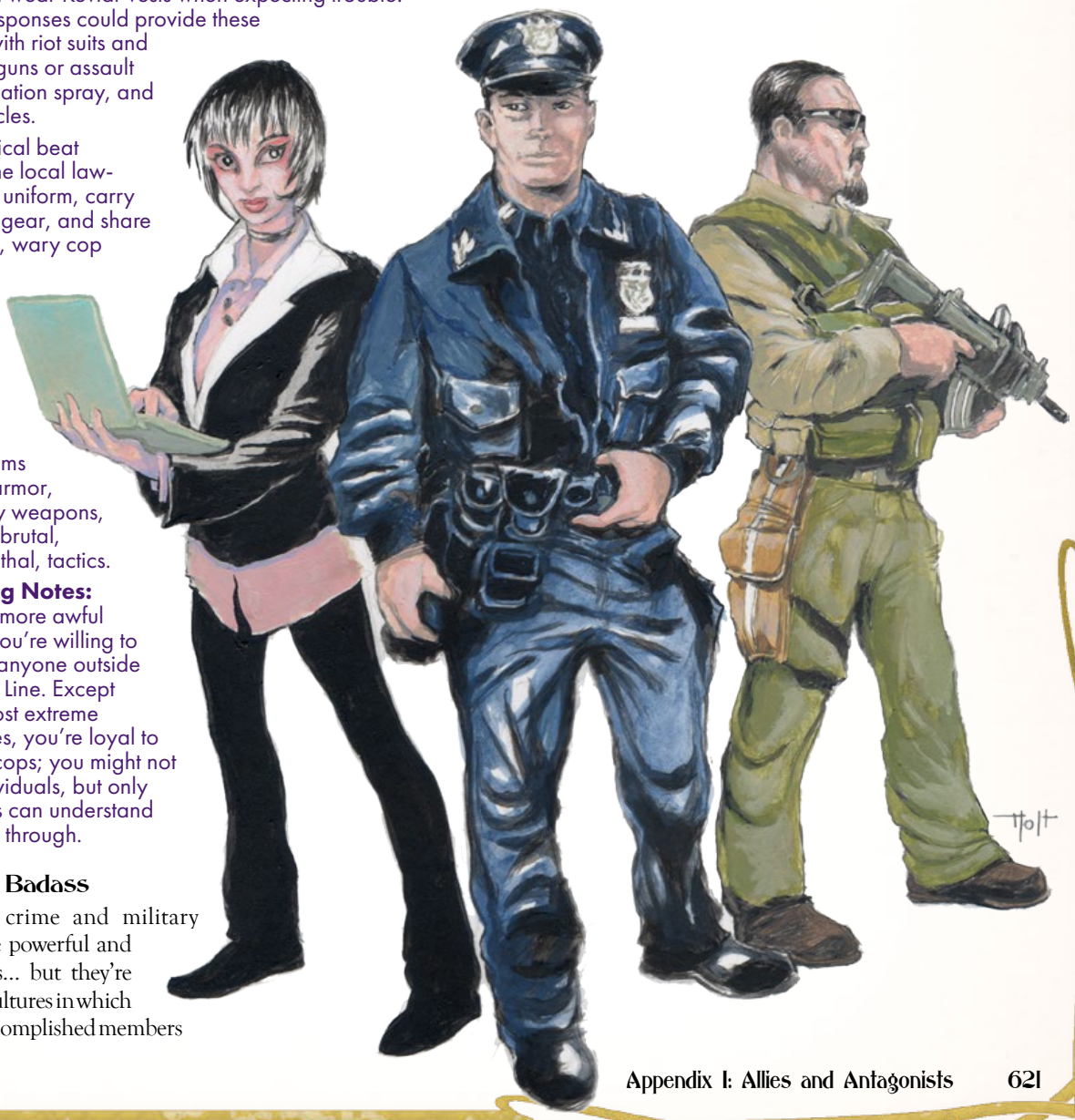
Professional Badass

Organized crime and military armed forces are powerful and pervasive groups... but they're also mortal subcultures in which even the most accomplished members can easily become the pawns of mages, vampires, spirits, and other supernatural creatures. As a result, many criminals are fairly superstitious (maybe even cowardly!), and all of them know that when something looks *too* weird, it's time to get the hell outta Dodge.

Even so, professional badasses – security specialists, mob enforcers, SWAT team members, assassins, gangbangers, military personnel, martial artists, and so on – regard themselves as very dangerous people. And by average-citizen standards, they're right. Such folks can't afford to *seem* cowardly or weak. As a result, you'll often find these badasses working for vampires, werecritters, dangerous organizations, rival mages, and perhaps even you! (The ***Allies***, ***Backup,*** and ***Spies*** Backgrounds generally employ these types of characters.)

Suggested Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1-3, Perception 2-4, Intelligence 2-4, Wits 3-4

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2-4, Brawl 3-4, Drive 2, Firearms 3-5, Intimidation 3, Martial Arts 0-4, Melee 1-3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3-5, Subterfuge 2, Technology 1-3



Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Equipment: Kevlar vest (perhaps heavy body armor in combat situations), knife and/ or club, shotgun or submachine gun, car, and various appropriate goodies.

Image: Regardless of individual appearance or fashion, a professional badass has the predatory look of someone who's survived many violent encounters and plans to survive many more.

Roleplaying Notes: Violence is your business, and business is good.

Government Agent

These operatives belong to the FBI, DHS, NSA, CIA, or some other alphabet-soup organization and show up when serious crimes occur – typically terrorism, kidnapping, serial killings, espionage, counterfeiting, drastic hacking, or apparent breaches of national security. In the World of Darkness, police and other local authorities often call in government agents after encountering inexplicable events. Local and national governments recognize that the world is not what it seems to be, so they send out agents to investigate and neutralize such threats.

Regardless of whether she's been called in to investigate a human serial killer or to check out reports about events that seem to defy the laws of physics, a government agent knows that her job is both important and dangerous. If she encounters someone performing obvious magick or triggering any other sort of paranormal event, she'll draw her gun, call for backup, and almost certainly start shooting if the supernatural activity appears to be in any way threatening.

Most government agents aren't official members of the Technocratic Union and have never heard of it. Many inadvertently work for it anyway. They might even have encountered ranking Technocratic Operatives and then assumed the operatives belonged to another secretive and powerful government agency above the agent's security clearance. The Union also monitors communications between government agents, sorts through reports, and debriefs agents who've been on interesting cases. If a government agent reports evidence of events that seem supernatural, the Technocracy (or perhaps the Nephandi...) might send in their own operatives to investigate and deal with apparent Reality Deviants.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2-3, Stamina 3-4, Charisma 2-4, Manipulation 3-5, Appearance 2, Perception 3-4, Intelligence 3-4, Wits 3-5

Suggested Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 2-3, Computer 2-3, Drive 2-3, Enigmas 1-3, Firearms 3-4, Investigation 3-5, Law 4, Martial Arts 1-3, Media 1-3, Melee 2-3, Politics 2-4, Research 2-4, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Technology 2-4

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Equipment: Badge and ID card, dark-colored suit, electronic surveillance devices, heavy pistol, sunglasses, plus body armor and heavier weapons in clearly dangerous situations.

Image: Thorough training makes the average government

field agent confident, well-groomed, capable, and at least slightly arrogant. In the field, such people wear clean and unusually durable professional clothing, with shoes and gear that look fashionable yet remain practical for heavy-duty work.

Roleplaying Notes: You're one of those folks standing at the edge of chaos... human or otherwise. Your training and experience make you formidable but not invincible, and you've probably had enough tough scrapes to understand the difference.

Extraordinary Operatives and Technocratic Creations

The vast majority of people working for the Technocratic Union are not Enlightened Operatives or Scientists. Instead, extraordinary scientists, technicians, and operatives handle many Technocratic chores. Beyond those rank-and-file sympathizers and proles, both Iteration X and the Progenitors create intelligent constructs that serve as guards, soldiers, spies, and assassins.

Although the Union would never call any of its members "hedge magicians," there's a Technocratic equivalent to that archaic conceit: *extraordinary citizens*. Extraordinary scientists and field agents do not count as Sleeper witnesses, so long as the Effects in question are focused through some form of technomagick. Unlike many of their co-workers, extraordinary citizens know what the Technocracy is and tend to be extremely loyal to it. When a Technocratic operative calls for backup (as per the Background of that name) in sensitive (that is, paranormal) situations, these are the folks who show up.

Such personnel can also use certain Technocratic Devices, though not Enlightened Procedures. And although most of these citizens work in labs, offices, and medical and equipment repair facilities, Convention field offices also deploy extraordinary field agents as well. Those agents typically carry one or two Devices; Iteration X agents often enjoy cybernetic implants, and Progenitor field personnel have various biomods (both as per the ***Enhancements*** Background). Even without such gear, extraordinary citizens carry tech that, among the Masses, would be considered bleeding-edge mega-cool.

Extraordinary Scientist

Staffing the labs that create, refine, and disseminate Technocracy hypertech, these visionaries enjoy high pay, professional prestige, and the coolest toys on Earth. Naturally, they know which side their Technocratic toast is buttered on, believe deeply in the Union's cause, and rarely turn on their employers except in the most dire circumstances... and seldom escape intact if they do.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Computer 3, Drive 1, Enigmas 1, Firearms 1, Hypertech 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 1, Medicine 2, Occult 1, Science (several suitable specialties) 4, Technology 4

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (two soak dice, total)

Equipment: Extraordinary scientists can manufacture, modify, repair, and employ Technocratic Devices and so tend to have all kinds of neat gear within close reach.

Image: Smart, cultured, and visionary, these men and women work near the tops of their respective fields... and they know it, too.

Roleplaying Notes: "...the brightest boys/ to play with the biggest toys..."

Extraordinary Field Agent

The wide range of field agents employs an equally wide range of skills. Depending on the Convention, Methodology, and purpose of the agent in question, such personnel may also have the following Abilities, and perhaps others as well: Crafts, Energy Weapons, Esoterica, Martial Arts, Law, Politics, Seduction, and other Abilities appropriate to the agent in question.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3-5, Dexterity 3-4, Stamina 3-5, Charisma 2-5, Manipulation 3-5, Appearance 2-5, Perception 3-4, Intelligence 3-5, Wits 3-4

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 2-4, Drive 1-3, Firearms 2-5, Hypertech 2-4, Investigation 3, Leadership 1, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Science 2-3, Streetwise 2-5, Technology 2-5

Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (three to five soak dice, total)

Equipment: Field ops, like other extraordinary citizens, can employ Technocratic Devices. Some have cybernetics or biomods that suit their respective duties, though such modifications tend to be subtle for all but the most invested operatives – see ***Cybernetics*** and ***Biomods and Genegineering Modifications*** in **Appendix II**, **(pp. 657-661)**. High-ranking agents also have access to the ***Visual Data & Analysis Spectrum (VDAS)*** described in **Appendix II**, **(pp. 655-656)**.

Image: Typical field agents look like whatever their particular assignment demands. Regardless of their position, though, these folks are not pushovers. To reach this level, a person must be, as the title suggests, *extraordinary*. And whatever an operative wears, that aura of competence shines through.

Roleplaying Notes: Yours is a hazardous and remarkable honor. Do your best to live up to it.

Common "Steelskin" Cyborg

Among the most effective field operatives in the Technocratic Union, the common cyborgs of Iteration X have received specialized mechanical and biomodification upgrades: increased strength and durability, life-support gear, built-in tools, sensors, or weapons, and so forth. Originally mundane human beings (or sometimes animals), they're now something more advanced than they once were. Although they've been conditioned to accept their newlives (and thus tend to be among the most loyal Technocratic personnel), these exos retain a degree of free will, if not much individual identity.

Typically known by alphanumerical designations (X-235, for example), steelskins often work as manual laborers, security personnel, infiltrators, investigators, and hunter-killer operatives. Despite their apparent depersonalization, though, they often retain distinct motivations and appearance unless they've had to go back for frequent Social Conditioning. In that regard, Technocracy cyborgs are essentially folks with odd, sometimes drastic, modifications and an unusually stubborn sense of duty to the Technocratic Union in general and Iteration X in particular. Unlike HIT Marks, these agents are not machines – they're people. Truly dedicated (or severely Conditioned) exos lose most of their personality, but many operatives retain it unless something awful happens... which, in the World of Darkness, it often, eventually, does.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3-4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2-4, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Melee 1, Science 2-3, Technology 3-5

Willpower: 5 (3 with regards to Technocratic programming)

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 1 (five soak dice, total)

Attacks/ Powers: Variable; all cyborgs possess implanted radios with cell phone and wireless Internet capabilities, plus USB ports and other data storage and linkage technologies. Every cyborg also has several additional implants and Traits, depending upon an individual's purpose:

- Combat agents gain +2 to Strength, Brawl, Firearms, and Melee; claws that do Strength +1 lethal damage; and +2 armor (bashing & lethal).
- Investigation agents add +3 to Computer and Investigation; possess IR and UV vision, plus enhanced hearing and smell (in game terms, reduce the difficulty of hearing and smell rolls -2, to a minimum of 2), and a VDAS datacrawl Device.
- Intrusion agents add +2 to Computer, Stealth, and Technology, and contain built-in tools and access jacks that reduce the difficulty of Technology and computer-hacking rolls by -2 (to a minimum of 2), plus a VDAS datacrawl.

Image: Despite the name, most steelskins look like fairly ordinary people (if somewhat bulkier than usual) with rather severe haircuts and mannerisms. Heavily processed cyborgs have shaved heads and bodies (regardless of gender) and a disconcerting flatness to their voices and gaze. Depending on their assignment, they might wear uniforms, street clothes, or coveralls that render them more or less sexless and monochromatic.

Roleplaying Notes: The Union is your life and Iteration X is your savior. Order is essential, and deviance is a crime.

Victor

Homo superior gets grown in a vat, tweaked to perfection, and released into the world through the genius of the Progenitor Convention. Whether male or female, this person's designation is "Victor" – an apparent jest whose origin remains unclear. Bred and conditioned to serve designated purposes, these apparently human beings act as clones of special individuals, field-assignment agents, infiltration experts, and public-relations symbols of the excellence that is the Technocratic Union.

Older-generation Victors tended to be rather dull-minded. The newer generations are quicker on the uptake, with dazzling hand-eye coordination and staggeringly good looks. Like their predecessors, new-millennium Victors seem stubbornly immune to pain – they *recognize* damage but don't appear to feel its effects. That said, they're still subject to mental instability (a psychological manifestation of Paradox, perhaps?), and – unlike cyborgs – remain unable to Awaken to the greater sense of things. Although they can use hypertech Devices, they cannot employ Enlightened Procedures, and thus remain limited in their usefulness to the Technocracy.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Firearms 4, Melee 4, Technology 3; depending on their training, most Victors also have two or three of the following Abilities at between one and four dots per Ability: Computer, Drive, Etiquette, Intimidation, Government, Martial Arts, Politics, Science, Seduction, Stealth, Streetwise, Subterfuge.

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, Terminated

Armor Rating: 0 (but see below)

Attacks/ Powers: Beyond their immunity to pain, all Victors all have one or two Enhancements (as per the Background Trait). For examples, see the ***Biomods and Genegineering Modifications*** featured in **Appendix II**.

Countermagick: 2 dice of innate countermeasures.

Image: A combination of breathtakingly good looks, feline grace, animal charm, and supreme fitness give the Victors an air of superiority. Unless one has been modified (or specially grown) to replace a particular person, these clones share the kind of aesthetic perfection you see on magazine covers and fitness advertisements. Victors look Photoshopped, but they obviously are not. That said, they have a near-universal tendency toward volatile emotions, mental illness, and irrational behavior.

Roleplaying Notes: You don't just *look* better than everybody else – you *are* better than everybody else! The Technocracy may be your god, but you're superior to damn near everyone who's not a high-ranking Technocrat. Do your job with pride, but never forget that you're the next iteration in human development... no matter *what* anyone else might think!

HIT Marks

Hyper-Intelligent Tactical units – formerly *Hyper Intelligence Technologies*, aka *HIT Marks* – provide the classic shock troops of Iteration X... and, more recently, the last-resort terror agents of Panopticon and the NWO. Although such extreme operatives have gone out of fashion in recent years, the Union still maintains, tinkers with, and occasionally upgrades these cybernetic machines. Drastic situations call for drastic measures, and in certain crises HIT Mark deployment seems... dare we say, *traditional*.

All HIT Marks appear to be somewhat bulky humans, so long as they remain fully dressed – muscular, but not inhuman. Careful observers who know what to look for, however, (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 8) might notice an occasional, flickering red glow in a HIT Mark's eyes as its targeting systems scan its environment. A HIT Mark's programming allows it to mimic human social interaction, but such monstrosities are far from good at it. Neither human nor machine but an uncanny fusion of both that's not even as human as a highly enhanced cyborg, each HIT Mark is essentially a skilled weapons system with vague sentience and ruthless targeting protocols.

Previous iterations (so to speak...) of these infamous machines featured deadly yet unreliable weapons, bulky design, heavy construction, and a fearsome susceptibility to the Paradox Effect. Subsequent redesigns (especially during the days of the full-scale RD purge of the previous decade) lowered the weight, increased flexibility, improved the camouflage systems (read: the ability to mimic human beings), and – most importantly – refined the HIT Marks' Paradox Effect profile. One short-lived version even incorporated the sentience of mind-wiped rival mages, but that experiment proved disastrous for everyone involved. The most current generation, however, can pass for human under most conditions, assuming that they're not forced into the sort of awkward social interactions that often betray their kind. Meanwhile, the popularity of movies featuring killer cyborgs, and the advancements in drone-weapon systems, allow the newest forms of HIT Mark to remain coincidental within technological reality zones. This, of course, makes them easier to deploy in urban environments... and if the Technocracy's true leadership has noticed this capability (which is probably the case), then there might be a growing army of HIT Mark Xs prepared for an approaching and terrible endgame...

For details about HIT Marks VI-IX, see the sourcebook ***Gods, Monsters, and Familiar Strangers***.

HIT Mark V - "Old Rusty"

The classic model from the 1990s is an antique now. Even after five new iterations, however, the Mark V still brings a shudder to Tradition mages everywhere. The most infamous model of its infamous line, the Mark V was a common sight in the old days. Despite its shortcomings, it's still a nasty piece of work. Several dozen units remain in service throughout both the Union and the ranks of its assorted allies. Even the occasional vampire or Pentex Industries operative appears with a HIT Mark V nearby, its power undimmed by its supposed obsolescence. How do Reality Deviants obtain such things? That's one of many skeletons hiding in the Union's collective closet...

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, all Skills and Knowledges 3 (excepting Cosmology, Esoterica, Meditation, Occult, and Stealth, all of which are 0)

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -5, Terminated

Armor Rating: 4 (nine soak dice, total)

Attacks/ Powers: Chain gun (200 rounds; difficulty 7, damage 8, range 150, rate 3); claws (Strength + 3; eight dice total); infrared and ultraviolet vision. Many models also carry additional human-style weapons – typically firearms of various calibers, rocket launchers, grenades, shotguns, swords, knives, and chainsaws. All HIT Marks have been programmed to be able to use *anything* as a weapon, and they can employ Technocracy hypertech like an Awakened operative.

Innate Countermagick: Five dice worth of Primium countermeasures; older models had only two, but those models have since been destroyed.

Hacking a HIT Mark

Earlier versions of the HIT Mark design – versions I through IV – were susceptible to "reprogramming" by computer-hacking Virtual Adepts. By the Mark V model, however, those bugs had largely been eliminated (+4 difficulty to all hacking attempts) by a combination of biological tissue, improved programming, and Primium countermeasures. By the Mark VII model, hacking had been rendered more or less impossible, thanks to the fusion of computer technology and biological brain matter. By the Mark X model, the computer-hacking glitch has been completely eliminated... one of several problems solved by the transition from thinking machine to biomechanical organism.

As self-governed machines, the HIT Marks cannot be cracked via remote access. A Reality Deviant needs to get his hands on each individual HIT Mark... a task, that, for obvious reasons, is not as easy as it sounds! Characters who want to hack an early-model HIT Mark need to spend at least 10 minutes with that task, making one Intelligence + Hypertech roll (difficulty equal to the HIT Mark's model name – i.e. 5 for a Mark V) for each iteration of the model (again, five rolls for a Mark V).

A HIT Mark X can be reprogrammed only with a combination of Matter 3/ Mind 3/ Forces 2, plus the hacking rolls as above. The protocols necessary to program a HIT Mark X remain closely guarded secrets within Iteration X and the NWO. Even members of those Conventions rarely have access to such information if they're below the Manager grade.

Image: A bulky badass, the typical Mark V is male, laconic, and dressed in heavy clothing to conceal various weapons and subtle, inhuman tics.

Roleplaying Notes: Circulate, locate, exterminate.

HIT Mark X – "The Invisible Soldier"

Today's standard HIT Mark model, the Mark X looks like an ordinary human who's strong, fast, and extremely deadly, with a limited face-shifting ability that allows it to make cosmetic changes to its features, gender, and skin tone. Without internal examination or magick, a Mark X remains indistinguishable from a muscular, if somewhat taciturn, human being. Such machines are no better at social banter than any previous HIT Mark model, but they're smart enough to know how to conceal this weakness; given the decline of social graces in recent years, such concealment isn't difficult.

Like its previous iteration, the HIT Mark IX, the newer model X employs a complex integration of nanotech and lab-grown organic tissue which creates a literally flexible bio-machine. To counteract the Paradox issues of earlier iterations, the newest HIT Marks are more like super-soldiers than death-dealing war machines. Even so, they're exceedingly effective and can take a *lot* of punishment.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Firearms 4, Melee 4, all other Skills & Knowledges 3, with the exceptions above.

Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -5, Terminated

Armor Rating: 6 (12 dice soak, total)

Attacks/ Powers: A Mark X unit lacks the internal firepower of previous models, but it can use human-sized gear and hypertech. A smaller claw array (damage: 8/L) gives this model an innate hand-to-hand component that – thanks to movies and comic books – remains essentially coincidental in technological reality zones. Beyond the usual sensory array of previous models, the Mark X has wireless Internet access and internal cell phone capability, plus five concealed USB ports, two high-capacity internal flash drives, and a VDAS datacrawl.

A Mark X that loses its last health level automatically self-destructs. Technocratic technicians can also set one to self-destruct if it's captured or incapacitated. Normally, this self-destruct function just fuses and melts all internal components into biomechanical slag. A skilled technician, however, can also cause the Mark X to explode, inflicting 8 dice of lethal damage upon everyone within four yards of the Mark X.

Countermagick: Four dice of Primium countermeasures.

Image: Though bulky and muscular, the Mark X looks unsettlingly human – a bit thick, perhaps, but not nearly as obvious as previous iterations had been.

Roleplaying Notes: Like a professional solider, you've been trained and conditioned to do whatever must be done. That said, you've got something approximating free will... not *much* of it, but enough to blur the line between human and machine to a degree that your creators would find truly unsettling.

Our Awakened Brethren

Every mage knows at least a few others of her kind. Among the many friends, rivals, and enemies along a mage's Path, the following Awakened folks might wind up playing a role in your chronicle or inspiring other mages along the way.

Urban Shamanic Musician

For some folks, the Path of the spirits requires potent hallucinogens, fasting, painful ordeals, complex meditative sigils, or hours of dancing and chanting. Other people find a swift and beautiful path to the world of the spirits using the creative power of music. Many folks think of shamans as residents of the Siberian wilderness, remote corners of the Amazon jungle, or other isolated and indigenous locales. Certain seekers, however, call upon the spirits of streetlights, pigeons, and skyscrapers rather than the spirits of rivers, wolves, or forests.

Jamming in bars and coffeehouses, asking advice from urban spirits, an urban shaman seeks to bring balance and harmony to humanity's ever-growing cities. In doing so,

she must fight the efforts of corrupt Technocrats, vampires, and other urban monsters, as well as the far more common problems like despair, apathy, greed, and the shitty income of a working musician.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 2, Art (several musical instruments) 4, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Cosmology 3, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Esoterica (various disciplines) 4, Firearms 1, Occult 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Technology 1

Suggested Arete: 3 or 4

Suggested Spheres: Forces 2, Prime 1, Spirit 3, Time 2

Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 1 (leather jacket and pants; four soak dice, total)

Equipment: Aging subcompact car, guitar, knife, light revolver, motorcycle leathers.

Image: Decked out in urban-tribal fashion, our shaman could be distinctly ethnic, culturally ambiguous, or an apparently standard-issue, white-bread suburbanite whose Path has led her away from mainstream Americana and into a more bohemian life.

Roleplaying Notes: The world is alive, and it speaks to you in a million voices – some harsh, some ugly, and others gorgeous beyond measure. Help give the best of them a voice in a world that has lost the gift of hearing them, and step carefully around the malignant ones so as not to fall into their traps.

Focus: Guided by a paradigm like *Creation's Divine and Alive* or *It's All Good – Have Faith*, the urban shaman specializes in practices drawn from witchcraft, medicine work, gutter magick and/ or Voudoun in addition to her obvious shamanism, channeled through music and other related (and probably disreputable) instruments.

Awakened Hacktivist

Some information *doesn't* want to be free, and many powerful people certainly want to keep it concealed. Even so, politically savvy computer-mages – many, but not all, of them Virtual Adepts – understand that releasing the right information in the proper places can spark social change and bring down governments. From Tahrir Square to Wall Street, these hacktivists work to uncover and publicize secrets that ignite popular reactions... and then spur those reactions toward bigger shifts of paradigm.

Using Trinary smart phones and recording devices, Awakened idealists hack systems, record damning materials, and then disseminate them through the channels that get the most attention in the shortest periods of time. Called "terrorists" by officials in a multitude of governments, and considered "Reality Deviants" by much of the Technocracy, these individuals are among the most daring and adventurous members of their respective groups.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Suggested Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 5, Drive 2, Enigmas 2, Firearms 1, Investigation 4, Media 3, Politics 4, Occult 1, Research 3, Science 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4, Stealth 2, Technology 4

Suggested Arete: 3 or 4

Suggested Spheres: Correspondence/ Data 3, Forces 2, Mind 2, Time or Entropy 2

Willpower: 7

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1 -2, - 2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 2 (armored T-shirt; five soak dice, total)

Equipment: Enhanced Trinary smart phone or tablet, light pistol, fake press passes, data-storage devices, motorcycle or subcompact car.

Image: Smart and furious, modern hacktivists either favor stylish and provocative clothing and haircuts, or else blend in with the scenery by dressing and acting as inconspicuously as possible. Both approaches have their merits, although dressing respectably tends to open more doors and win more sympathy from the Masses. Radical fashions can be fun but alienating, and most hacktivists have learned that mainstream outrage is the true tool of revolution.

Roleplaying Notes: Delay, compromise, and silence are no longer possible... if indeed they ever were. The system is rigged and the bastards are everywhere. Kick in their doors and blow down their walls. Change demands action, and the time for both is now!

Focus: *Everything is Data*, might also be *Chaos*, and is certainly on a *One-Way Trip to Oblivion* unless someone changes the signal. Thankfully, *Tech Holds All Answers*, so these technomancers employ reality hacking, cybernetics, hypertech, and perhaps other practices (chaos magick, hypereconomics, dominion, maybe even martial arts) to get the point across and change the world before it's too late.

Black Suit

Except for gender and skin color, these mysterious beings all look more or less the same: a well-dressed person in a dark suit and sunglasses, usually carrying a briefcase and always driving an expensive car. Most, though not all, are bald and virtually hairless. Descendants of old-school black knights and the dark-clad investigators of Victoria's elite detective corps, these are the front-line agents of the New World Order.

Composed largely of clones created for such duty, the Black Suits begin as field agents with a chance at upward mobility. Cloned agents (derived from a handful of distinguished retirees of several different ethnicities) initially share a hive mind, whereas the NWO recruits other agents from the outside world and then Socially Conditions them to an appropriate degree of loyalty and competence. Agents who display potential are soon groomed for better things; some Awaken and get promoted, and the remainders function as rank-and-file field Operatives. The best of the best graduate to become Gray Suits, Intelligence Analysts, and perhaps even White Suited Gatekeepers. Although the Black Suits embody an obvious and unnerving authority, such Gatekeepers work in the shadows of that authority... and with far more competence than their obvious peers.

Regardless of their degree of Enlightenment, all Black Suits appear soulless to anyone who examines them with Spirit magick;

their thoughts and memories remain hidden to all but the most skillful Masters of the Mind Sphere. Whether or not a particular Black Suit can, in game terms, use Technocratic magick, each one of them can employ Technocratic Devices and a Mind Sphere Effect that intimidates everyone nearby. (See below for details.) Black Suits typically travel in groups of between three and six agents, each member's specializations complementing the others'. These agents seem to be immune – or at least resistant – to Paradox, but that might be because they rarely use vulgar Effects. Instead, they prefer subtle yet pervasive psychology, martial arts, and advanced weaponry.

Black Suits appear taciturn, matter-of-fact, and intensely focused on their current mission. Very few of them display any sense of humor beyond a dry and understated sarcasm. When killed, Black Suits of all types rapidly dissolve into a pool of liquid that evaporates within seconds, leaving behind no evidence of their existence.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 3, Drive 2, Energy Weapons 3-5, Enigmas 1, Firearms 3, Hypertech 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Martial Arts 3-4, Meditation 2, Melee 3, Science (typically Psychology) 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3, Stealth 5, Technology 3

Suggested Arete: 3-5 (Enlightened Operatives only)

Suggested Spheres: All Enlightened Black Suits have at least Mind 2, plus two to four other Spheres between Ranks 2 and 4. Typically, these Spheres are Forces, Prime, Time, or Entropy, occasionally Life or Correspondence/ Data.

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -2, -2, -5, Vaporized

Armor: 4 (in their ever-present suits; seven soak dice, total)

Attacks/ Powers: In addition to guns and hypertech weapons, Black Suit teams generate a constant aura of fear around themselves. To overcome that aura, an enemy must make a Willpower roll against difficulty 5 +1 for every Black Suit present (maximum of 10). Even those characters who resist the full effects feel disconcerted in the presence of so much as a single Man in Black. Intimidation is an essential weapon in the Black Suit arsenal.

Equipment: Hypertech smart phone, high-density mesh-weave suit (the armor mentioned above), armored briefcase, badge & ID card, heavy pistol, large black car, various Technocratic Devices, and a VDAS datacrawl.

Image: See above; most Black Suits are Caucasian or Asian, though a select and growing number seem to be of African, Indian, or Latino origin. All Black Suits appear fit, imposing, and grim, composed and dignified under even the most difficult circumstances.

Roleplaying Notes: Other agents might wield more brute power or technological weaponry, but you and your comrades are the finest and most essential agents in your Order's employ. Remain proud and strong even in the face of fierce adversity.

Focus: In *A World of Gods and Monsters, Might is Right,* and *Tech Holds All Answers.* Through a skillful combination of dominion, reality hacking and martial arts, a Black Suit employs all manner of technologies, from weaponry to meditation to force of social domination.

Awakened Enemies

Some of these dangerous, and often insane, individuals hide within the Traditions or the Union. Others blend in among the Masses. All of them can be deadly threats, especially when you don't realize that you've met one until it's far too late...

Marauders

Awful examples of Dynamism gone too far, each Marauder is an individual living out reality as he, she, it, or they sees it. Their apparent immunity to Paradox, combined with the disrupting effects they tend to have upon their surroundings, places them among the most fearsome threats a mage can face. Although certain Marauders share delusions common enough to allow them to work together, most of these Mad Ones operate in personal realities too arcane for any other mage to fathom. The lore surrounding these entities is mostly conjecture. Non-Marauder mages who try to understand them wind up confused at best, among them at worst.

Because of their reality-warping powers, Marauders are typically run best as walking plot-devices who can – within reason – do whatever the plot requires. For more details, see the **Chapter Five** section about ***The Mad***.

Pillory (Nightmarish Marauder)

Pillory began, so the story goes, as a girl with Asperger's Syndrome and a taste for pain. It was the pain, she'd say, that brought her out of herself. As she grew, she allowed herself to fall into relationships so abusive and injurious that her Avatar's shriek could be heard reverberating through the Otherworlds. Finally, one climactic burst of agony broke through her Sleep. Pillory Awakened... but that Awakening trapped her in a permanent nightmare that she now shares with everyone nearby.

Essentially a solo Marauder, Pillory has crafted four arms for herself out of Life Magick. One holds a bell, which she constantly rings; one remains empty-handed; the third has forged itself into a razor-barred cage full of butterflies whose colors perpetually shift and change; and the fourth has become a whip with dozens of thick, spiked thongs. She has neither eyes nor a nose, nor ears – only a mouth gaping in an eternally silent scream. Spiders crawl in and out of that mouth, which opens not from her jaw, but from her forehead. A swirl of tangled hair hovers around Pillory's head – a crackling, sick halo of coruscating blue. Her long dress shines in a deep, wet crimson shade.

For the most part, Pillory remains in the Otherworlds, tormenting the spirits and tormented by them in return. From time to time, however, she seeps through into material reality, bringing with her a dark red mist that spreads out from her body like thick oily smoke. That smoke smells ripe and meaty, like air from a slaughterhouse. Each time she casts a spell, the bars on her butterfly cage open up; a flock of butterflies escapes, morphing into the effects of the spell itself. Those butterfly spells appear as smears of bright colors in the air. All the while, Pillory remains silent. Even ambient sounds fade to nothing when she comes near.

Classified as an Extreme Marauder Complex Manifestation, Pillory has been known to take playmates – she's especially fond of Nephandi and Ecstatics of the more sinister persuasion. That said, she neither speaks nor seems to hear anyone else speak. Wrapped in an extreme version of her original isolation, this Mad One floats about, snapping her whip, releasing her butterflies, and ringing a bell that makes no noise. In her presence, reality vibrates as if shaken by potent sound waves that no one can hear.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 2, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Computer 3, Cosmology 4, Intimidation 6, Melee 4, Stealth 3

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (five soak dice, total)

Arete: 6

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Entropy 3, Forces 2, Mind 4, Prime 2, Spirit 4

Equipment: Whip-fingers (damage 5/L; can grab and entangle targets), silent bell, butterfly cage-hand (all of which provide focus for her Arts).

Image: See above.

Roleplaying Notes: Though blind and deaf, you perceive your surroundings through Correspondence and Mind magicks. To you, nothing is real except pain, and that reality is your god. Share that Paingod with as many entities as possible. It enlightened *you*, after all, and it can do the same for every other being too.

Focus: Ecstatic pain in an existence beyond sanity.

Hive (Innocuous Marauder)

Sometimes the deepest madness lives right next to us, moving through our world without a whisper until some unexpected disaster forces us to realize what was already there. In the case of Hive, that madness has many faces too – all of them working toward some unfathomable end.

Hive isn't a single Marauder... or rather, Hive *is* a single Marauder permanently co-located in several locations at once, with all of those selves linked through a hive-mind spell. Thankfully, Hive remains unaware of this fact. As far as Hive is concerned, Hive is an office drudge working at a dead-end job... at several places simultaneously. Each self has a different name, a different face, and a different identity. Essentially, Hive is a living Multiple Personality Disorder who's consciously unaware of the tremendous power Hive commands. If Hive became aware of that power, life could get extremely difficult for a whole lot of people.

The few people who know of Hive theorize that Hive was once a powerful wild talent, an even more powerful Virtual Adept, or a Technocratic employee who quietly snapped. Instead of exploding into the typical pyrotechnics, Hive manifested its low self-esteem as an embodied "human resource" rather than the powerful mage Hive could be otherwise.

How, then, do people know Hive exists? Because Hive plays pranks on, and occasionally sabotages, Hive's employers.

"Hive" is a name attached to various exposé emails, blog posts, and leaked documents. Folks who've met Hive in the Digital Web recall a collection of fractal images that shift constantly – not an especially strange thing in Netspace, but memorable nonetheless. In material reality, Hive is a collection of nondescript office drones. If you met any of them, you'd never know that the particular drone is anyone of note. Especially observant characters (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 9) might pick up a tremble in Hive's aura and hear a variety of voices buzzing in the vicinity of an otherwise unremarkable person. Beyond that, Hive answers only to the name of each individual person Hive embodies. On a conscious level (and to a surface Mind Sphere scan), those various minds seem dull, insecure, and utterly unremarkable. Only on a subconscious level does Hive realize what Hive truly is.

Several of Hive's manifestations work for Technocratic offices – not as extraordinary or Enlightened personnel but as mundane drudges. As a result, Hive leaks occasional Union secrets without even consciously realizing that the individual manifestations have even *heard* of a Technocracy to begin with. If and when Hive trips over some of the nastier skeletons in the Technocratic fruit basket, things could really get ugly... especially if, in the process, all of Hive's selves wake up simultaneously...

Suggested Attributes (per manifestation): Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Suggested Abilities (likewise): Academics 3, Alertness 5, Awareness 5, Computer 4, Cosmology 2, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Hypertech 3, Stealth 2, Sciences 3, Subterfuge 5, Technology 3, plus various individual skills appropriate to the various identities (treat as the Background Dream 5).

Willpower: 8 (apparently 2)

Health Levels (each manifestation): OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0 (two soak dice, total)

Arete: 7

Spheres: Correspondence 5, Entropy 2, Forces 2, Life 5, Mind 5, Prime 2, Spirit 2, Time 3

Equipment: Smart phone, laptop, pens, flash drives, and other tools of the modern office worker's trade.

Image: As mentioned above, Hive manifests as a number of low-tier office workers who – aside from their uncanny intellect and grasp of various skills – seem remarkable only by their complete ordinariness. These selves comprise several different sexes and ethnicities, each with complex backstories about their individual home lives. Some of these Hive entities even work in the same offices, apparently unaware that they're all the same entity.

Roleplaying Notes: Life's so boring. If only something *exciting* would happen...

Focus: Like many Mad Ones, Hive operates in a plane beyond conscious focus – unaware, in this particular case, that Hive's even doing magick at all.

Nephandi

As mentioned in **Chapter Five**, the Fallen are rarely obvious. Under most circumstances, Nephandi appear to be someone or something else entirely unless they occupy the very lowest (and most expendable) ranks of their society.

Widderslainte Cultist

A small number of the Awakened are doomed and damned from the moment of their birth. Although most Nephandi are Awakened mages who go through the Cauls of their own volition, some Fallen are simply born that way, inheriting a twisted Avatar that had belonged to another Nephandus in a previous incarnation.

Even before the Awakening, a widderslainte's mind is tainted. Some of these deviants are cunning (and often violent) sociopaths who con and bully their way to power. The most dangerous ones, however, are quiet women and men who lose themselves in dark reveries, living unassuming lives until they start to realize their full, horrific potential.

Once a Nephandic soul Awakens, a widderslainte mage soon makes contact with the inhuman entities he might have dreamed about since his strange and nasty childhood. Some natural-born Fallen find others of their kind, but many of them encounter foolishly hopeful mages who seek to redeem them. Attempts to "Save the Fallen One" almost always fail... and, in the process, take other mages down to death, despair, or the Cauls.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Suggested Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Art 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Drive 1, Enigmas 3, Esoterica 2, Firearms 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3, Technology 2

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Suggested Arete: 3

Suggested Spheres: Entropy 2, Life 2, Spirit 2

Equipment: Black clothes, knife, small pistol, diary filled with corrupt stories and foul poems.

Image: Our young Nephandus could be the archetypal misfit kid – male or female – whose interest in heavy metal and other outlaw music genres outweighs everything except a keen interest in the bizarre. Already somewhat of a bully, this demonic teen might be a school shooting waiting to happen. Worse still, she could be an apparently normal kid whose good grades and clean personality mask a cruel intellect and a sociopathic heart... in short, then, a budding politician or executive who aims devilish accusations at the innocent misfit kid who just wants to listen to Cradle of Filth in peace.

Roleplaying Notes: There's a black space in your heart that's been in place since your birth. Although outsiders might blame your cruel and amoral behavior on bad parenting or warped circumstances, you know that you are, as they say, bad to the bone. Always have been, always will be, so you might as well enjoy it while you can.

Focus: *Everything is Chaos,* and this person is happy to give it a little shove... or, perhaps, a really big one. Maleficia is this mage's obvious practice, but it might be wrapped around something else – witchcraft, dominion, reality hacking, the Art of Desire, or some other appropriate discipline.

NWO Infiltrator

Although some Nephandi are born Fallen, most choose to enter the Cauls willingly. Their reasons can include numbing despair, implacable fury, a passion so intense that a person would literally sell her soul to get the object of her obsession, or simply the desire to be on what she believes to be the winning side. These last two motivations are especially common among members of the Technocratic Union who join the Nephandic ranks. When you're already a fanatic, after all, going over the edge of decency is just a short step away from where you already stand.

Fallen NWO operatives become some of the most dangerous Nephandi in the Union. As the Technocracy's police force, these operatives have an easy time reshaping the Union to their darker purposes. They're also among the infiltrators who are hardest to detect; their mastery of Mind Procedures allows them to conceal their thoughts and erase doubt and suspicion from the minds of their fellows and underlings. Like normal members of this Convention, NWO Nephandi excel at long-term planning. Many of their seemingly innocuous actions are parts of an extended plan to bring both the Masses and the Union under their complete control... and from there, to ultimate extinction.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Suggested Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Computer 3, Cosmology/ Subdimensions 2, Drive 2, Enigmas 2, Firearms 3, Hypertech 3, Intimidation 4, Martial Arts 3, Melee 2, Stealth 3, Sciences 3, Subterfuge 5, Technology 4

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 4 (from high-density mesh-weave suit; seven soak dice, total)

Suggested Arete: 6

Suggested Spheres: Correspondence/ Data 4, Entropy 3, Forces 3, Mind 4, Prime 3, Dimensional Science 3

Equipment: High-density mesh-weave suit, armored sedan, Technocratic smart phone, heavy pistol, VDAS gear, and hidden surprises of various nasty kinds that range from Technocratic goodies to Nephandic Talismans and tactics.

Image: He looks like a Man in Gray – cheerless, accomplished, and formidably capable. He's got the same sort of blurred thoughts as any Black Suit, and for good reason: in reality, he's playing the most dangerous game imaginable, among playmates whose primary vocation involves turning minds inside out. As a survivor – even a master – of that game, he's unspeakably good at what he does. No lesser mage could match his achievements, and the fact that he has succeeded thus far testifies to his supreme competence.

Roleplaying Notes: In a world of double-blinds and perilous truths, you exist along the razor's edge between superiors who know what you are and peers who'd kill you horribly if they recognized your true allegiance. The Nephandi might run the Union from the inside out, but at your level, and in your Convention, this is still a dangerous proposition. Subvert your supposed allies, terrorize your known enemies, spread the agenda of your hidden masters, and recognize that you'll all be screaming in the end.

Focus: On a *One-Way Trip to Oblivion,* he's the conductor of the secret train to hell. On the surface, he employs the tools and practices of a typical NWO operative; below his subversions, however, it's maleficia all the way down.

Spirits

Outside the material world looms the greater reality of the spirit realm. Its Umbrood denizens remain largely on the far side of our Gauntlet. From time to time, however, they manifest on the Earthly side of that barrier... or wind up meeting mages on the spirits' home turf when those willworkers pass over into the spirit lands. And though Dreamspeakers and other shamans are the mages most likely to meet such entities, any mage – even a Technocrat – can encounter them under the right (or wrong...) circumstances.

All spirits have the ***Airt Sense*** Charm. For the rules dealing with spirit entities and their various abilities, see **Chapter Nine**, **(pp. 488-495)**.

Naturae

Embodiments of natural forces and principles, Naturae resist the foolish trivia of Umbrood politics. Instead, these entities dwell in the Penumbra and Middle-Umbral Realms, reflecting the spiritual elements of our Earth.

Ancient Forest-Heart (Grand Natura)

Embodied in both the mortal realm and the Penumbra as a titanic tree at least 150 feet tall and 20 feet across at the base, a forest-heart entity personifies the spirit of old-growth wilderness. Every primal forest has at least one such spirit, and vast woodlands have several of them. Depending on the region, a forest-heart spirit could manifest as an ancient pine, sequoia, birch, willow, oak, or other form of tree indigenous to that area. If such a tree burns in its Earthly aspect, its ashes and remains disperse to form new trees that can hold its spirit. If that tree gets cut down in the mortal world, however, its spirit is destroyed – trapped, some folks say, in the bits of tree that get cut up, shipped far away, and transformed into furniture, ships, houses, and other wood-based constructions. And if that should happen, the forest literally loses its soul... at least for a time.

Though essentially anchored to its tree, a forest-heart spirit sees and hears everything that happens within its woods. The whorls and contours of its bark and inner rings preserve its memories. Using animals and other spirits as its eyes, ears, and hands, this entity recalls, guides, and, to a degree, defends its territory. Although its senses and priorities are not those of a

lesser-lived entity (like a human mage), a forest-heart can provide information and advice to a mortal who knows how to ask correctly. If nothing else, the forest-heart shapes the spirit of those woods: a friendly spirit presides over a calming, settled, relatively peaceful forest, whereas a hostile one manifests a tangled, dark, and hazardous domain. It's worth noting that a forest-heart tends to reflect the spirit of intruders back upon themselves. Visitors who treat the woods disrespectfully often anger a forest-heart, who'll take its deep-seated rage out upon every mortal who dares to enter that forest afterward. The wilderness, it's been said, holds a grudge for a *very* long time...

Forest-heart spirits take the long view of things; with few exceptions, mortal matters do not concern them. Things are born, things die – such is the way of the world. Only when a mortal (or a group of mortals) either delights or threatens the domain does a forest-heart care about brief human lives. A respectful traveler might earn the forest-heart's goodwill, whereas a logging crew incites its anger. Until recently, the fury of a forest-heart was enough to discourage human intrusions; woodlands were vast, implacable mysteries to be avoided whenever possible and traversed along paths that tended to run far away from the forest's heart. Within the last three centuries, that has changed drastically. Forest-heart spirits, however, are slow on the uptake – and because cold winds, falling trees, ferocious wolves, and walls of thorns are more likely to harm a hiker than a logging crew, those old tactics no longer protect a forest the way they once did.

Even now, though, a mortal who respects the forest and understands its language can commune with a forest-heart spirit, assuming she knows the way to do so. Trees speak without words, and so that mortal needs to understand the subtle language of nature – not the hasty words of humanity – if she wants to speak with such a being. A forest-heart speaks though sensory impressions, and so a conversation with one involves sights, sounds, tactile sensations, and so forth, rather than words. Especially considering that those impressions often come from animals, birds, insects, and plants, not from human beings, a conversation with the forest-heart can be puzzling, frustrating, and apparently one-sided unless the mortal knows how to listen properly to what's being said.

Although a forest-heart spirit appreciates mortals who revere the ways of nature, it'll probably want some tangible payment in exchange for anything beyond safe passage or a nice place to sleep for a night or two. Typical bargains with such entities include protection from loggers and other intruders, restoration of a damaged area, retribution for some injury against the woods, mortal stewardship, the purging of some great threat, or other, similar requests. Because mages tend to be more suited to such services than ordinary mortals are – and often know how to listen better than the average modern human being – Awakened mystics tend to recognize this spirit for what it is. Even so, certain unAwakened human beings can commune with a forest-spirit too... just ask Julia Butterfly Hill. Forest-hearts tend to rise from the center of an Umbral glen – usually with a potent Node marking the spot. Werewolves frequently build their caerns near such places (or even *in* them), so the mortal who wants to commune with a forest-heart spirit might find that conversation rather... challenging... to arrange!

Willpower 8, **Rage** 4, **Gnosis** 7, **Essence** 200

Charms: Appear, Armor, Cleanse the Blight, Create Wind, Disorient, Forest Sense, Lightning Bolt, Mind Speech, Mist, Summon Wildlife (brings fierce animals to the spirit's defense; 1 Essence per animal), Tracking, Umbraquake

Animal Spirits (Gafflings and Jagglings)

As animists have always known, animals have spirits too – not "souls" as people define that term (although they just *might* have souls too...), but spiritual personifications of the essence of each species. Beyond the obvious totem spirits, these animal spirits appear, in human terms, as Gaffling and Jaggling spirits that resemble the beast in question but possess mystic powers too. A mage, then, might encounter a crow spirit, serpent spirit, horse spirit, and so on – all with powers that suit their particular beast.

In general, animal spirits look like normal animals (see the ***Bestiary***), with the gifts of mental or physical speech; sapient personalities; and a few appropriate mythic powers like great speed, a paralyzing stare, and so forth. Given the vast array of potential animal spirits – which extends even to extinct beasts like titanic insects, dinosaurs, and other such creatures – we encourage the Storyteller to treat such powers as low-level rotes (Ranks 1-4, with an Arete between 2 and 6) or story elements based on the legendary talents of the associated animal. All animal spirits have the following Charms in addition to all others: ***Airt Sense***, ***Appear***, and ***Reform***. Jagglings can ***Materialize*** (as per the animal type, with greater intellect), and have other Charms and powers as well.

In Background Trait terms, such entities may become Allies or Familiars, too. A handful of examples includes:

Crow

Willpower 6, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 25 (Gaffling) to 50 (Jaggling)

Charms: Influence, Materialize; some crow spirits also have Possession and Spirit Away.

Powers: Foresight and prophecy (like a Time 3 Effect). Crow Jagglings can rouse spirits (Spirit 2); step sideways and lead ghosts to the Afterworlds (Spirit 3); or even open gates in the Gauntlet (Spirit 4).

Serpent

Willpower 5, **Rage** 6, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 20 (Gaffling) to 30 (Jaggling)

Charms: Blighted Touch, Cleanse the Blight, Influence; some serpent spirits also have Materialize, Possession, and Shapeshift.

Powers: Regeneration, Healing, and Injury (Life 2 and 3). Serpent Jagglings can send and enter dreams (Mind 3 and 4), locate and tap Quintessence (Prime 3), or control fate and fortune (Entropy 2).

Horse

Willpower 9, **Rage** 7, **Gnosis** 7, **Essence** 25 (Gaffling) to 50 (Jaggling)

Charms: Armor, Materialize. Some horse spirits can also Create Wind, call Lightning Bolts, Spirit Away, and stomp up an Umbraquake.

Powers: Incredible speed (increased movement) and the ability to cross vast distances (Correspondence 3). Horse Jagglings can also co-locate (Correspondence 4), fly (Forces 3), or summon storms (Forces 4/ Prime 2).

Owl

Willpower 7, **Rage** 4, **Gnosis** 6, **Essence** 20 (Gaffling) to 40 (Jaggling)

Charms: Influence, Materialize, Tracking. Certain owl spirits can also Create Wind, Cleanse the Blight, and employ Corruption.

Powers: Foresight (Time 3). Owl Jagglings may manipulate fate and fortune, command decay (Entropy 2 or Entropy 4), or possess people and walk among their dreams (Mind 4).

Monkey

Willpower 7, **Rage** 9, **Gnosis** 7, **Essence** 25 (Gafflings) to 50 (Jagglings)

Charms: Influence, Materialize, Shapeshift. Some monkey spirits can also Armor up, Spirit Away, and evoke an Umbraquake.

Powers: The ability to craft or destroy solid elements (Matter 3). Monkey Jagglings may also sidestep distances (Correspondence 3), "monkey" with probability (Entropy 2), or heal or inflict massive injuries (Life 3).

Totem Spirits

For shamans both urban and otherwise, the totem spirits present an array of allies that few other people – even Awakened ones – understand. Ecstatics, Dreamspeakers, and other spirit-workers contact these entities, sometimes adopting them (and being adopted *by* them) as mystic kin – see the ***Totem*** Background Trait for details. Any mage with Spirit Sphere magick can deal with totem entities, though few mages bond with them the way that shamans do.

Classified as *Incarna Umbrood* by Hermetic-type mages, totem spirits are essentially gods. Though they tend to manifest *totem avatars* – lesser entities that represent a sample of that spirit's essence – such beings are immortal, boundless, and beyond the definitions of simple game stats. (For some sample totem avatars, see the animal spirits above.) On most levels, totems are far older than humanity, even when they take identities from human myths. Many represent animals, plants, or other natural forces, although some totems personify mythic beings and others represent ideas. A few technological totems seem drawn from the concepts and powers of the modern age, and though they lack the timeless majesty of their primal kin, they can be quite powerful in the industrialized world.

The following entities reflect a tiny portion of the world's potential totems. Although they're among the totems a North American mage is most likely to meet, these spirits transcend geography, and have different identities and conceptions in other human cultures. Coyote, for example, is uniquely American, but Spider, and Crow have many faces, names, and personalities across the world.

Human mages and shamanic werewolves interact very differently with totem spirits. Even so, the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** line features a wide array of potential totems. That said, mage characters do not buy totems the way that werewolves do. A mage's Totem Background reflects the level of contact he has with a given spirit; the spirit itself decides how intimate a bond the totem shares with its adopted human, and that bond can change over time. Again, see the ***Totem*** Background entry in **Chapter Six** for details.

A handful of North American totem spirits includes...

Raven & Crow

The supreme Trickster, Raven is said to have either made or saved the world on numerous occasions. His little cousin Crow

Totem Traits

Each totem-spirit entry has the following features:

- **Manifestations:** When a totem sends an aspect of itself in physical form, that totem avatar usually manifests as an animal or human-like figure. Generally, the manifestation has the game Traits of a related animal or character, although it can – at the Storyteller's discretion – be as powerful as the spirit (and the Storyteller) wants it to be.
- **Associations:** As embodiments of animals, forces, and ideas, totem spirits have personalities and attitudes when they deal with humankind. Shamans and other human allies take on these associations when they deal with totem spirits, and might attract the attention of a totem by living out its associations before the two of them even meet each other.
- **Brood:** Most totems, especially animal spirit totems, have a *brood*: lesser spirit Gafflings in its family. Such spirits reflect the totem's Associations and identity: Raven sends spirit crows, crow girls, and raven men, but Glitch spits out electrical spirits and data-eater viruses. Unlike the totem itself, these spirits can be caught, fought, or contained... although a mage who does such a thing had better watch out for the associated totem afterward unless that totem has sent its broodling to aid its human ally.
- **Abilities:** If a totem adopts a human ally, that ally gets a bonus to an Ability associated with that spirit. Most totems have several related Abilities, although a totem-bound shaman receives a bonus to only one of them. This bonus isn't an official Trait that gets added on to the character's Abilities – it's a few additional bonus dice that get added to the character's existing dice pool. If, say, Spider Chase gets adopted by the Spider totem (in game terms, getting the Totem Background), she'd receive a few dice added to her normal Crafts Trait, although the Trait itself would not go up.
- **Bans:** Totem allies have certain things they should or should not do. Also called *taboos*, these bans reflect the deal a shaman strikes with the totem spirit in exchange for its favor. If that person breaks the ban, the totem might withdraw its favor... and, in game terms, the Background Trait. If that person wants to keep the spirit happy, he ought to make some sort of apology and atonement to the spirit. Until he does, that character loses dots in the Totem Background, and might even lose it for good if the ban was broken badly enough.

is slightly more humble but no less clever. Smart, pragmatic, and unsettlingly knowledgeable, Raven and Crow have sinister connotations to some people and cultures for their habit of snacking on the dead. As a result, Raven and Crow are considered *psychopomps*, ferrying the spirits of the dead on to their rightful resting places... and occasionally bringing them back for revenge.

Manifestations: Flocks of crows or ravens, exceptionally large and/ or vocal individual crows or ravens.

Associations: Intellect, knowledge, death, prophecy and foresight, mortality, tricks.

Brood: Corvid spirits, white ravens, mysterious people with long black hair, mischievous and often ominous folks in black – often with a snide or eerie sense of humor.

Abilities: Enigmas, Medicine, Subterfuge.

Bans: Raven-people aren't expected to place much stock in earthly goods, properties, or concerns. Wealth is to be avoided unless it involves knowledge, secrets, or shiny things.

Coyote

Lusty Coyote is a carnal trickster, less intellectual than Raven but cunning as hell. Perched somewhere between Wile E. Coyote and the darker figure of traditional lore, Coyote (also *Coyote-Sister*) is a shape-changing survivor who never lets apparent disadvantages slow him down. Real-life coyotes thrive in bad circumstances, and so do Coyote's chosen folk. Raggedly seductive, Coyote often sees his plans backfire in his face, yet he never stops looking for the next successful scheme.

Manifestations: Singular coyotes, bodiless barks and cries in the night, disheveled yet attractive people with instinctive wit and feral behavior.

Associations: Cunning, lust, tricks, shape-changing, cowardice, determination.

Brood: Coyote spirits, magpies, vagabonds, and nomads.

Abilities: Stealth, Subterfuge, Survival.

Bans: Aside from forbidding the harm or killing of coyotes, Coyote puts no limitations on his chosen kin.

Spider

Crafty and delicate, Spider represents another ambivalent totem. On one hand, she's the industrious creator of intricate masterworks... and yet she's the treacherous bringer of poison and pain. Regarded sometimes as *Grandmother Spider*, *Arachne*, or *the Widow*, Spider holds an alien patience. Even folks who fear her (and most people do) recognize her beauty. Whether or not they want to get close enough to learn her many lessons is a personal decision. Spider herself rarely cares what lesser creatures want. To impress her, a human being must be as patient and dedicated as Spider herself.

Manifestations: Huge spiders, arachnid swarms, Pattern Spider spirits, people with unsettlingly spider-like characteristics, large webs, and other eerie (often nightmarish) apparitions.

Associations: Poison, cleverness, craftsmanship, stability, patience, fear.

Brood: Pattern Spiders, spider-kin, certain manifestations of the Fates.

Abilities: Craftsmanship, Esoterica, Intimidation.

Bans: Spider's chosen are not sloppy, hasty, or easily frightened. She understands the killing of her children (after all, they eat one another too!), but cannot abide a clumsy, trembling human bug.

Glitch

An Incarna of the computer age, Glitch embodies the many frustrations and strokes of misfortune that *shouldn't* happen and yet happen all the time. Glitch fouls communication, mangles data, crashes systems, and otherwise renders mechanical and electrical goods into infuriating blocks of pure malfunction. Often appearing as a coruscating blot of electrical malice, Glitch seems to enjoy showing off the limits of human vanity. Technoshamans both revere and dread this totem. Although they can direct Glitch's attention into enemy gear, its capricious favors have a nasty habit of taking out technology of all kinds... particularly when you least expect it.

Manifestations: Electrical surges, crackling balls of energy, error messages (often displaying a snide sense of humor), the dreaded Blue Screen of Death.

Associations: Malfunction, humbleness, ruin, chaos amidst order, the error of relying too heavily on mortal technology.

Brood: Computer spirits of all kinds, viruses, gremlin-imps, Pattern Spiders with crackling auras and eerie deformities in their usually sleek forms.

Abilities: Computer, Hypertech, Technology.

Bans: Don't get too proud – Glitch fucking hates that shit.

City-Heart

Typically known by the name of the city it embodies, City-Heart personifies the essence of the city itself. Urban shamans can petition such entities for protection, knowledge, and connection to the city's unknown places. In return, these shamans devote themselves to the city's welfare, either through political methods (working to improve the city and preserve its landmarks and character), humanitarianism (typically helping the city's poor and dispossessed residents), vigilantism (protecting the city's people), shadow work (assisting the city's underground, often in ways that most citizens would consider criminal), or maintaining the city's supernatural community (weeding out intruders and striking as much of a balance as possible among the various vampires, werecreatures, mages, and other Night-Folk throughout the city).

Manifestations: Whispers, human figures who seem to epitomize the city's personality, weather fluctuations, odd shadows, rustling newspapers, eerie vigilantes or criminals, and urban omens like messages spelled out on neon signs, graffiti, or randomly arranged trash.

Associations: Whatever characteristics seem most appropriate to the city in question.

Brood: Urban wildlife spirits (rats, roaches, alley cats, pigeons, raccoons, seagulls, etc.) and city people who embody the best and worst elements of the city in question.

Abilities: Area Knowledge, Etiquette, Streetwise.

Bans: A person devoted to a city should not leave that city if she can possibly help it. City-bound shamans tend to make offerings of material goods, money, service, or some combination of the three, all intended to make the city a better place to live. Truly wealthy city-shamans erect monuments, parks, urban projects, sports complexes, or other noteworthy buildings, whereas other shamans lobby fellow citizens to construct or restore landmarks that distinguish the place.

The Man

The embodiment of Authority with a capital "A," The Man maintains a rigid and often oppressive sense of order. His suit is always pressed, dark, and clean. Though his guise shifts from culture to culture, the most common manifestation of The Man these days is a tall, looming man with short hair, dark glasses, and an implacable expression. In his best aspects, The Man wards off disorder, stabilizes his community, and safeguards people who follow The Rules. All too often, though, The Man and his devotees hound and destroy people and spirits who apparently threaten the localized sense of order. As international forces expand and deepen their reach, The Man can be found almost anywhere, the Big Brother of which we're so often warned.

Although Technocrats don't make shamanic bargains with The Man, they might find themselves under his protection and benevolent guidance. Along with The Machine, this is one of the two exceptions to the rule forbidding Technocrats to purchase the Totem Background, and those characters *certainly* don't see themselves as shamans dealing with spirits. Such nonsense is clearly Deviant and should be purged at the first opportunity.

Manifestations: Scary spirit men, often appearing as cops, executives, Men in Black, stern priests, and other dominant father figures. The Paradox Spirit known as ***Judgment*** might be a manifestation of The Man.

Associations: Order, authority, oppression, protection, strictness, supervision, preservation of the status quo.

Brood: The Man favors Black Suits, for very obvious reasons.

Abilities: Intimidation, Leadership, Melee.

Bans: The Man cannot countenance disorder, disrespect, chaos, cowardice, or other deviant behavior.

Mary Jane

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Mary Jane offers relaxation, fun, playfulness, and a sense that things can be put off till later or enjoyed more fully than they usually are. Often appearing as a cute hippie girl in '60s-style attire, Mary Jane watches over people who hurt (often soothing their pain), folks who like to bend the edges of a stressful day or otherwise break through mental barriers that impede a joyful approach to life. Despite her frivolous appearance, however, Mary Jane's a healer with potent medicinal lore. Her connection to healing is quite ancient, really. Beyond her obvious ties to stoner culture, Mary Jane has been associated with peace, the easing of pain and constraints, and the softening of inner blockades. Arbitrating conflicts of body, mind, and soul, she helps her chosen people slow down and enjoy the world... although sometimes they enjoy it a bit too much for their own good.

Manifestations: Clouds of pot-scented smoke, the hippie girl, and other incarnations of cannabis-associated archetypes (a Beat-style bohemian, laid back jazzman, stoner dude, and so forth) under a variety of names.

Associations: Release, bliss, healing, insight, laziness, distraction.

Brood: White birds, smoke spirits, fireflies, and people who seek comfort.

Abilities: Esoterica, Etiquette, Medicine.

Bans: Mary Jane abhors violence and will not ally herself with people who take pleasure in harming other living beings. She also isn't fond of authority figures, and although she might tend to peace accords, she won't aid people who feel rigid unless they want to loosen up.

The Machine

It's *everywhere* these days, this manifestation of our industrialized world. Once a clunky, steaming block of automated might, The Machine now takes the form of sleek technology, glowing computers, miniaturized gadgets, living cars, and other toys of the modern age. It's been said that technology has no soul... but that's not true. Anyone who's ever dealt with a quirky computer or a particularly smooth machine, everyone who's ever cursed her car or shouted at his TV, each mechanic and technician and end-user and inventor, has conferred a little bit of Essence into the totem-soul of machinery.

For folks who revere technology – especially imaginative Etherite gadgeteers and the devotees of Iteration X – The Machine is an animate ideal... not a *god*, exactly, but the conscious and immortal distillation of mechanized perfection. Some theorists speculate that the extradimensional Realm called Autocthonia could be the heaven where such an entity resides. That's nonsense, of course... Machines aren't *deities*. Still, all the energy of focused human devotion has to go *somewhere*... and just as Plato speculated about a realm of idealized forms, it stands to reason that the omnipresence of technology has a place somewhere out there in the reaches of possibility... and it's very much alive.

Manifestations: Sparks, clouds of smoke, mechanical devices of all kinds that seem... and sometimes *act*... alive.

Associations: Technology, perfection, industriousness, stability, functionality, luxury, oppression, soullessness.

Brood: Pattern Spiders, mechanical people, animated vehicles, and other machines.

Abilities: Crafts, Hypertech, Technology.

Bans: The Machine requires service, inventiveness, precision, a commitment to technological innovation and repair, and a relentless pursuit of self-perfection.

Elementals

Manifestations of elemental forces, these entities range from near-mindless Gafflings to Elemental Lords and Ladies – essentially Incarna of their respective principles, with Realms that favor their chosen element. Hermetic wizards and other classical high-ritual types have worked with such entities for millennia; more recently, mad scientists learned to employ elemental spirits for certain errands... discovering, in the process, that modern innovations like metal, glass, and electrical power have inspired their own elemental spirits... or were, perhaps, inspired *by* them...

Such entities often create ***Environmental Hazards***, as detailed in **Chapter Nine** under the section of that name. In addition to the Charms listed below, every elemental spirit also has ***Element Sense*** and a ***Meld*** Charm that allows these entities to shift into or out of their native element; this costs two Essence points, and works only within that spirit's appropriate element. In the wake of an elemental's passage, the element might be disturbed for a turn or so... possibly, as with earth and metal elementals, until something else reshapes that material.

Air Elemental

Manifesting as an ephemeral girl, breezes, or a column of wind, an air elemental remains immaterial – visible, perhaps, but ultimately untouchable. If she chooses to speak, such a spirit whispers in a voice that only mages and other spirit-attuned creatures can hear.

Willpower 3, **Rage** 8, **Gnosis** 7, **Essence** 40

Charms: Appear, Cleanse the Blight, Create Wind, Reform, Updraft

Earth Elemental

Composed of lumpy dirt and stone, this vaguely masculine elemental speaks in a grating voice and refuses to hurry along. Like the earth itself, he does what he does in his own sweet time.

Willpower 10, **Rage** 8, **Gnosis** 5, **Essence** 40

Charms: Armor, Materialize, Stone Fists (as Blast, but hurls stone instead), Shapeshift, Umbraquake

Fire Elemental

Hungry and crackling, the genderless fire spirit consumes everything that will burn. If happy, this entity remains a small glowing ember speaking in puffs of smoke; outraged, it explodes into a howling conflagration, igniting everything in its path.

Willpower 5, **Rage** 10, **Gnosis** 5, **Essence** 30

Charms: Blast, Create Fire, Materialize

Water Elemental

Often, but not always, embodied as a seductive young woman, the water elemental's smooth voice and sinuous form recall the mermaids and sirens inspired by the sea. Her forms echo the nature of the water from which she comes: a swamp hag, spring child, river nymph, or oozing sludge girl.

Willpower 6, **Rage** 4, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 30

Charms: Blast, Cleanse the Blight, Flood, Healing, Materialize

Electricity Elemental

Impersonal and fearsome, this bright snapping figure flashes like oddly human lightning, arcing between conductive materials and sizzling everything that can burn. If such an elemental speaks, its words buzz like furious metal bees.

Willpower 6, **Rage** 7, **Gnosis** 5, **Essence** 40

Charms: Control Electrical Systems, Lightning Bolts, Short Out

Glass Elemental

Glittering with jagged edges or gleaming with unbroken liquid grace, a glass elemental can shatter itself and fling its bits across open space, then pull itself back together with the

slick fluidity of gleaming CGI. Such beings speak with sibilant cadence and seem, by human standards, to be quite vain.

Willpower 4, **Rage** 7, **Gnosis** 7, **Essence** 45
Charms: Blast, Materialize, Shatter Glass

Ice Elemental

Temperatures plunge if this elemental appears. Most often embodied by a frozen man, a glittering ice queen, or a shrieking blizzard cloud, the ice elemental hisses like falling snow or cracks out its words like breaking ice. In its wake, frost patterns etch themselves across nearby surfaces, and ice leaches the warmth and traction from everything within the elemental's cold reach.

Willpower 6, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 25
Charms: Blast, Create Wind, Freeze, Frozen Breath, Ice Prison (as Calcify, except manifested as ice), Slip

Metal Elemental

Shaped from specific metal types (steel, iron, bronze, copper, etc.), these dense entities range from smooth-skinned humanoids to lumpy blocks of ore. In all forms, metal spirits are incredibly heavy, remarkably flexible, and damn near impossible to hurt. When they speak, such elemental voices echo as if across some great distance. Their words sound sharp and stilted, and their movements ring like clashing metal plates.

Willpower 8, **Rage** 4, **Gnosis** 6, **Essence** 30
Charms: Armor, Materialize, Shapeshift, Soul Reading

Storm Spirit

Swirling up in thick crackling clouds, embodiments of tempest combine several different elements in one. Water, air, and electricity spin through a storm spirit's form, lashing out with wind, rain, lightning, and angry thundered words. Such entities grow far larger than other elementals, too – from the size of a "personal raincloud" to the span of a football field (in which case, the Essence Trait is two or three times the usual amount).

Willpower 8, **Rage** 8, **Gnosis** 4, **Essence** 50
Charms: Appear, Cleanse the Blight, Create Wind, Lightning Bolts, Umbraquake

Wood Elemental

Shaped like a skeletal (though perhaps quite lovely) woman, the wood spirit evokes the fabled dryad no matter where she happens to be from. Certain wood spirits resemble horned men,

too: naked, rustic figures with ruddy skins and often leafy faces, darting between trees. Such entities almost never speak; if they do, their words whisper like the breeze between branches or clack with hollow resonance.

Willpower 4, **Rage** 4, **Gnosis** 5, **Essence** 25

Charms: Cleanse the Blight, Element Sense (within wood), Materialize, Shapeshift, Soul Reading

Minions

Servitors of greater powers or principles, Minions display an intellect of sorts. Some of them follow an instinctive purpose with only the faintest glimmer of sentience. Others can be as cunning and perceptive as any mortal human, though perhaps not cosmically aware like the greater spirit entities.

Memophores (Digital Web Entities)

Entities composed of living information, *memophores* (also known as *daemons*, *zerks*, *data beasts*, *info elementals*, and other humanocentric names) display self-willed intellect. Originally, it's been said, these Digital Web inhabitants begin as human-crafted computer programs. In time, however, they gain sentience through enigmatic combinations of Quintessence, information, and the invested attention and belief of the Masses. Such origins certainly spawned the early generations of data beasts. Newer ones, however, appear to generate spontaneously from the essence of the Digital Web itself – embodying popular concepts, perhaps, but never programmed in the human sense of that word.

Not long ago, netizens considered such entities virtual animals or, in more flattering terms, Internet angels embodying the Divine Will of the Web. Memophores have their own ideas about their origins, ranging from bland acceptance to existential contemplation or religious fervor. Simple entities follow the basic dictates of game-system characters or data-courier programs given hints of personality. Their advanced counterparts, on the other hand, seem as real as any human netizen, with all the emotional complexities that such reality entails.

The spontaneous existence and deepening sophistication of the various memophores (a name, incidentally, that many such beings reject) reveals the continued evolution of the Web as a cosmos in its own right. Where once it was viewed as the creation of Virtual Adepts (a perspective many Adepts still share), the Digital Web appears to be a self-generating, self-regulating reality... one that's tied, without a doubt, to human technology but no longer dependent upon it... if, indeed, it ever *was* dependent upon it in the first place. That revelation, in turn, has thoughtful mages pondering the origins of humanity... and considering the origins of the first memophores, the potential answers aren't always flattering.

Twenty-first century memophores range from simplistic clouds of information or digitized reflections of CGI to full-bodied, eloquent beings with impressive powers and capabilities. Game-wise, these characters possess five Attribute Traits – Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Intelligence, and Wits – plus a range of Abilities that suit an individual memophore's nature and personality. The overall appearance and agendas of such characters depend upon their origins: office programs inspire dry, simple memophores with industrious personalities and rigid temperaments; hacking programs have evolved into rebellious anarchistic memophores, whereas advertising spawns loud, garish, and frequently annoying entities.

Originally divided up into power levels (see **Digital Web 2.0**), today's memophores often get referred to by category ratings... in much the same way that meteorologists refer to *storms* by category ratings. This in itself says a lot about the way that human netizens view their data-elemental peers who keep evolving in the unpredictable cosmos of the Digital Web.

Category 1: Traits of 1, three dots of Abilities, three health levels

Category 2: Traits of 2, six dots of Abilities, four health levels

Category 3: Traits of 3, 10 dots of Abilities, six health levels

Category 4: Traits of 4, 15 dots of Abilities, eight health levels

Category 5: Traits of 5, 20 dots of Abilities, 10 health levels

Category 6: Traits of 6, 25 dots of Abilities, 15 health levels

A few sample memophores include:

- **LOLCat:** Cuteness elemental, often manifesting as an adorable (often young) animal in an endearing situation. Tends to speak in abbreviated childish banter ("*I can haz...?*"). Apparently immortal, this shapeshifting entity seems to be totally impervious to harm, avoiding conflicts through the sheer intensity of its charm. Has an uncanny talent for making people smile. *Traits*: Category 1; Expression 3

- **Screamer:** Ranting dude or lady with a monumental (sometimes literal) chip on their shoulder about some cause or aggravation. *OFTEN SPEAKING IN ALL CAPS*, Screamer tends to be extremely annoying... and, these days, he seems to be *everywhere*. *Traits*: Category 2; Brawl 2, Expression 3, Research 1

- **Link:** Eager information courier, often embodied as a flash of light illuminating potential areas of interest and connection. Speaks either in the warm voice of a young woman or the confident tones of a mature man. Apparently devoted to creating greater connections between people and information, possibly as an act of religious fervor. *Traits*: Category 3; Etiquette 4, Research 5

- **Nerdrage:** Seething cloud of aggressive and often incoherent insults, sometimes manifesting as a white human male of unflattering appearance and demeanor. Tends to be grotesquely sexist, racist, homophobic, and obsessed with bodily functions and related insecurities. Fanatically fixated upon pop-culture trivia and/ or paranoid political theories; often has impressive resources to draw upon. Can occasionally be talked into something resembling pleasant conversation by an apparently sympathetic peer. *Traits*: Category 4; Computer 3, Esoterica (geek culture) 4, Expression 3, Research 3, Technology 2

- **The Leak:** Coruscating dark swirl of information, seeping through shadows and cracks, sometimes taking on vaguely human shapes. Rarely speaks, and whispers when it does so, in a sibilant voice with no discernable gender or culture. Occasionally, that voice sounds like a crowd of people speaking urgently in hushed tones. Dedicated to exposing secrets from any source, the Leak possesses a knack for slipping through computer security systems, and occasionally allies itself with mortal hackers who promise to put that information to good use. *Traits*: Category 5; Computer 5, Research 5, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

- **Non:** Masked and black-robed person of undetectable gender. Speaks in accented English, though that accent ranges from upper-crust English to Latin-American Spanish, Academy-formal French, and a vaguely Nordic tone not tied to any specific nationality. Non honors no country nor ideology beyond self-government and the will of the People. That said, Non despises secrecy, especially among powerful and abusive institutions like banks and governments. Occasionally manifests sharp blades and speaks with great eloquence. Allied with the Leak, Non despises the Technocracy and has been included on several internal kill-lists... none of which acknowledge that Non exists only as self-willed information. *Traits*: Category 6; Academics (political philosophy) 3, Athletics 2, Expression 3, Melee 3, Research 3, Stealth 5

Pattern Spider (Technology Minions)

Spirits of order and static reality, Pattern Spiders embody the forces of technology in the spirit world. The least-powerful of them appear as steel-and-crystal spiders an inch or two across; the largest approach, or even surpass, the size and mass of a small car. Most Pattern Spiders tend to incorporate pieces of various technological devices in their bodies and limbs: steam vents, vacuum tubes, pneumatic cylinders, integrated circuits, and so on. Most of these beings dwell in the Penumbra, always close to centers of advanced technology, indoctrination, and other centers of material and spiritual stasis.

Although they reflect the growing influence of technology in the material world, these cybernetic spiders cannot materialize in the mortal realm. Instead, they work to make certain that reality remains as static as possible in the regions where the spiders are most common. Media centers, classrooms, factories, construction sites, military installations, and Technocracy Constructs host hundreds, often thousands, of these entities per site. Yet despite their apparently symbiotic relationship, very few Technocrats realize that these things even exist... much less regard them as allies. To the handful of Technocrats who've seen Pattern Spiders first-hand, the spiders look like one more weird-ass alien life-form to be attacked and purged whenever possible.

As for the spiders themselves, they seem oblivious to the concept of individuality or independent thought. When they bother to communicate at all, these near-mindless beings refer to "us," not "I," address humans in collective terms, and regard their own existence as a simple task, not a complicated journey. The idea that one might exist apart from the whole, much less pursue an individual existence, remains beyond their grasp.

Even so, certain mages have managed to strike deals with Pattern Spiders – usually by giving them a project, leading them to an Umbral location in need of repair, or otherwise giving these industrious spirits something to do. Virtual Adepts sometimes bond with the data creepers that swarm around their workstations, and Etherite Scientists study the fascinating manifestations of insectoid energy-pattern loci in the counterdimensional pockets within their labs. Shamans who deal with werewolves refer to these creatures as "servants of the Weaver," regarding them as symptoms of a stagnant world. Yet for those mages who understand the greater benefits of technology, Pattern Spiders can be potent allies.

Weaving webs of solidified reality, Pattern Spiders spin pattern webs around flaws, ruins, or disruptive parties who threaten the integrity of localized reality. In game terms, they use the Calcify Charm to capture intruders, and the Solidify Reality Charm to stabilize the surroundings on a metaphysical level. Certain Pattern Spiders have other Charms as well, reflecting a control over electrical, mechanical, and data-storage systems. In story terms, these beings spin their webs with tireless precision, tiny data creepers ferrying information through electric networks or weaving it into knots of stored data. Although they don't appear in material reality, their work reinforces things like the Gauntlet or the feel and stability of a given place. A handful of the older entities can vibrate their webs in such a way as to cause pain to folks in materialized reality... an effect that goes a long way toward explaining the headaches and bodily discomfort people get when they spend too much time around certain types of technology...

Willpower 6, **Rage** 4-7, **Gnosis** 6, **Essence** 25-50

Charms: Calcify, Solidify Reality. Some large spiders also have Control Electrical Systems, Short Out, Lightning Bolt.

Paradox Manifestations

All mages fear these entities, which show up only in response to Paradox backlashes. Some mages refer to them as "reality's immune system" or "Technocratic shock troops," but in truth, these beings operate by their own rules and serve no obvious masters beyond the incontrovertible principles of cosmic reality itself. Most of these entities seem aligned with a particular Sphere; if so, that Sphere has been listed next to the Paradox Spirit's name.

Judgment (Destructive Vulgar Magick of Any Sphere)

When careless mages endanger the Masses with obviously vulgar magick, Judgment might appear. Inspired by the collective faith and fear that Sleepers attribute to their laws, this spirit manifests as a high-ranking member of the local law enforcement, like a police detective, SWAT team member, or Military Police officer. In especially lawless areas – like war zones, urban wastelands, criminal subcultures, or night-culture undergrounds – Judgment shows up like some paranormal

vigilante, straight out of an action flick or comic-book movie... with all the violence that implies.

In whichever form he wears, Judgment first tries to arrest the offending mage, barking a terse warning along the lines of "*Dead or alive, you're coming with me.*" If the mage surrenders, Judgment snaps handcuffs on the mage and hustles her off to a waiting car (also a manifestation of this spirit). If she resists – which she probably will – Judgment proceeds to clean her clock and *then* haul her into the waiting car.

That nearby car resembles an ominous vehicle of punishment: a cop car, paddy wagon, black limousine, superhero transport, armored military vehicle, horse-drawn hearse, or whatever else seems appropriate. A few seconds after the mage enters Judgment's vehicle, Judgment and the offender appear in the spirit's Paradox Realm. To anyone else who observes these proceedings, the vehicle starts to drive off... and then vanishes in a cloud of mist or drives off into the enveloping darkness of night. Examining the location where the vehicle vanished, a mage with at least three dots in Spirit can both determine where the vehicle has gone and possibly (with Spirit 4) travel to that Realm... if he dares.

Once the mage reaches Judgment's Realm, the spirit places her in a jail cell within an otherwise empty police station, then leaves her to contemplate her actions. In this cell, no magick functions and mundane escape attempts all fail. After an agonizing wait (24 hours or so in the outside world, an apparent eternity for the mage), the prisoner faces arraignment for her crimes, and she must defend her actions to a heartless, merciless, judge — who is, of course, Judgment. If the mage lacks an excellent defense (self-defense, protecting the lives of Sleepers, or some similarly good reason), Judgment then locks the mage up in another cell for several years... or at least until someone manages to free her. A series of successful Social Trait-based rolls, backed up by evidence, might sway the judge; a bad attitude, on the other hand, merely assures a long and lonely sentence...

Given the implacable power of Judgment and his Realm, this spirit might be an aspect of the totem Incarna called ***The Man***. Although Judgment has been known to appear in a female guise (usually to punish sexist offenders), this entity almost always manifests as a large, imposing, and humorless man.

Willpower 7, **Rage** 9, **Gnosis** 6, **Essence** 60

Charms: Armor, Blast Flame (appears as a pistol or other appropriate weapon), Calcify, Disorient, Influence ("*Surrender*"), Materialize, Mist (as darkness, fog, or "smoke bombs"), Reform, Shapeshift (only when changing roles), Solidify Reality, Spirit Away, Track. Judgment also manifests a constant field of six dice in countermagick, plus the "field of Judgment" aura that renders all outside attacks ineffective.

Materialized Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 4, Brawl 6, Drive 3, Firearms 6, Intimidation 8, Investigation 4, Law 5, Melee 6, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 3

Materialized Health Levels: 20

Wrinkle
(Typically Time, Sometimes Other Spheres)

One of the most infamous and powerful Paradox spirits, Wrinkle is also, in some ways, one of the least hostile. Appearing as an exceedingly old man or woman in a perfectly tailored, but extremely wrinkled,

white tuxedo, Wrinkle walks up to the offending mage and politely tells the mage that she's caused a disturbance... and that he'll help the mage repair it. "Old Man Wrinkle" then asks the mage if she's *willing* to fix the problem. If the mage agrees, then she instantly finds herself, with her companions, back a few moments in the past, one turn before she cast the spell that caused the Paradox backlash that caught Wrinkle's attention – and if she then chooses to avoid using magick that time around, all is forgiven.

Should the mage elect to use magick again anyway – and if doing so brings about two or more points of Paradox – she'll find herself talking to Wrinkle again. With diminishing levels of politeness, he asks her to try another approach. If treated respectfully, Wrinkle can be exceedingly patient, willing to allow the mage up to three tries; that mage, however, cannot spend Willpower to stave off Paradox effects. Mages can't cheat Wrinkle in this fashion.

If the mage mouths off to Wrinkle, or if she cannot find a way out of her situation that doesn't involve creating more than one point of Paradox, she disappears from consensual reality and finds herself frozen in time – conscious and aware, but removed from existence. Trapped in a hellish no-time space, she periodically receives new visits from Wrinkle. If she agrees to behave herself, she finds herself back at that moment of choice. And if not, she may be gone for a very, *very* long time...

Like the old-school spirit that he is, Wrinkle places great value on good manners and heartfelt apologies. By that same token, he has no patience with rudeness or pride. Obnoxious mages disappear from reality, their pasts edited so that everyone believes they died in some earlier tragedy. From time to time (so to speak...), a long-lost mage reappears, shaken, aged, and nearly mad with isolation. More often, though, a rude offender disappears for good...

Willpower 8, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 30
Charms: Freeze Time, Materialize, Time-Editing (3 Essence), Unbirth (erases mage from reality; 10 Essence)
Powers: Freeze Time, Edit Reality (see above for details)
Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, use Gnosis for all other Traits
Abilities: Alertness 5, Enigmas 4, Intimidation 5
Materialized Health Levels: 6

Sendings

Certain spirits are simply messages – disembodied communications with images and voices and apparent consciousness but no form to speak of, even in an ephemeral sense. In older times, these *Sendings* were considered omens, visions, or divine messages; in the wake of the Avatar Storm, they were viewed – rightly or otherwise – as communication from Masters trapped beyond the Gauntlet. Cosmic theories suggested that these Sendings had forged together rampant disembodied consciousness, bits of myth, shards of broken Avatars, fragmented ghosts, legendary heroes, and perhaps even aspects of lost and shattered gods. And although these entities *do* appear to have minds and identities of their own, their ultimate nature remains unknown.

In game terms, a Sending is a walking story element, an enigma whose motivations and origins are whatever the Storyteller wants them to be. Although these spirits might take the name and form of familiar archetypes or legends – Loki, Br'er Rabbit, Mother Mary and so on – they don't inhabit a relatable form for long. These are flashes in the sky that look like faces; wandering strangers who speak a few words and then disappear; the crying child or pathetic old man who reaches for a touch of kindness before fading away. A Sending can be the wizened twin of a player character, glimpsed in a bustling crowd but gone when they try to find him; or the strange, overheard words that come from nowhere when a mage's back is turned. One might resemble a panhandler on the side of the road whose face flickers into a skull, or the image of a distant parent when the mage drives past. Another might be a heap of broken roadkill that gets up, shakes itself vigorously, and walks off into the woods. In short, a Sending is a dash of weirdness added to your **Mage** chronicle. Though a Perception + Enigmas roll might suggest its identity, the truth behind such a vision should remain one of those odd moments that define a magickal life.

Appendix II: Odd Ends

Do not be misled by our errors, our lack of vision, or the fear that makes men cruel; we serve a reality, my child, though we may not always perceive it clearly.
— Dr. Mulish Latimer, from Dion Fortune's *The Demon Lover*

Merits and Flaws

Mages, as we've seen, are exceptional people. And so, certain Traits – the *Merits and Flaws* referred to in **Chapter Six** – mark elements of distinction in a mage's life. Merits favor that mage with certain blessings, but Flaws curse him with particular frailties. Each Trait either costs points to buy (Merits) or else supplies extra points (Flaws) that you can use to purchase other things.

As noted in **Chapter Six** **(see p. 253 and p. 256)**, a player can purchase any number of Merits but can take a maximum of seven points of Flaws. As an *optional rule*, a character may instead have any one or two Flaws, regardless of their point cost, but the character is limited to *only* those one or two Flaws, and no more.

Generally, Merits and Flaws cannot be purchased after character creation, although the Storyteller may decide to give them to characters in place of experience points if those Traits seem appropriate to the events within the chronicle. Depending upon those events, a player might be able to use experience points to buy off a troublesome Flaw. In *all* cases, Merits and Flaws are *optional* Traits. The Storyteller may disallow some, all, or none of them – it's *her* choice.

Merits and Flaws fall into five distinct categories: *physical*, *mental*, *social*, *supernatural*, and *genetic*. The last category reflects Flaws based upon the ***Enhancement*** Background or other long-term alterations to a character's physical form.

Given the dozens of Merits and Flaws presented throughout the **Mage** line, the full range of Merits and Flaws is too vast to fit within this small Appendix. You can find a compilation of additional Traits in the sourcebook **The Book of Secrets**. Several of the Merits and Flaws presented below have been modified from their old-school origins, in order to reflect rules changes in **Mage 20** and the World of Darkness series as a whole.

Merits

Extra edges for the Awakened world, Merits can be purchased by any sort of character. Normal humans don't usually have supernatural Merits, but they can easily have physical, mental, or social ones. Even so, many of these Traits tend to be unusual unless the person moves in fairly heroic circles.

Acute Senses (1 or 3 pt. Physical Merit)

Your physical senses are unusually sharp, capturing nuances that few people ever notice. In game terms, your character

Merits and Flaws

Name	Cost/ Bonus	Type
Merits		
Acute Senses	1 or 3	Physical
Berserker	4	Mental
Dark Triad	3	Social
Language	1	Mental
Stormwarden/ Quantum Voyager	3 or 5	Supernatural
Ties	3	Social
Too Tough to Die	5	Physical
True Faith	7	Supernatural
Umbral Affinity	4	Supernatural
Flaws		
Addiction	1 or 3	Mental
Construct	2	Social
Cursed	1 to 5	Supernatural
Deranged	3 or 5	Mental
Echoes	1 to 5	Supernatural
Enemy	1 to 5	Social
PTSD	2 to 5	Mental
Stress Atavism	4	Mental

reduces the difficulty of her Perception-based rolls by -2. At the 1-point level, a single sense (vision, hearing, touch, taste, smell) is more acute than usual; at the 3-point level, all five physical senses are equally sharp.

Language (1 pt. Mental Merit)

Beyond your native language, you understand another form of communication. Each 1-pt. Language Merit reflects a single language, typically in its written form as well as the spoken one.

Mages – especially Hermetic wizards, Syndicate diplomats, and Technocratic field ops – tend to know a number of languages, both common (French, Latin, Mandarin, Spanish) and obscure (Old Kingdom Hieroglyphics, High Akkadian, Jovitos). If you possess five Language Merits or more, then you've begun to understand the principles of language itself and can try to unravel languages you don't already know (Intelligence + Enigmas, difficulty 7 or higher).

Characters should have background-based reasons for understanding various languages. It's perfectly reasonable to assume that a barrio teenager might know English, Portuguese, several dialects of Spanish, and possibly even Arabic. If she's also got German, Sanskrit, and Classical Greek on her character sheet, however, then someone's got some explaining to do.

Dark Triad (3 pt. Social Merit)

A charming (and chilling) blend of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and sociopathy makes you a smooth-talking rule-breaker. Many people find your *Fuck Authority* attitude seductive, and they follow your lead even when it's not in their best interests to do so. To you, however, these devotees are simply toys – useful and enjoyable, of course, but ultimately expendable. Your own pleasure and convenience are the only vital things in life.

A natural Merit for cult leaders, tempters, Fallen mages, and corporate tycoons, the Dark Triad adds three dice to all of your Seduction, Manipulation, Leadership, Subterfuge, and Charisma-based rolls. The fact that your character doesn't truly *care* about the people she inspires isn't readily apparent except to people who know what to look for. Because social consequences do not hinder your character, people find her exhilarating to be around. As a result, folks continue to follow and defend her, even when her actions should be indefensible.

Despite its obvious power, this Merit contains a significant story-based downside: Dark Triad folks are amoral bastards who act only according to their own perceived interests. Even on a malignant Path, such sociopathy becomes dangerous, especially when other people notice that individual's behavior. Not even the Nephandi trust such a person once her tendencies become clear – after all, she might sell out the Fallen as easily as she sells out anybody else. The Storyteller may decide that this Merit isn't suitable for player characters, and restrict it to supporting roles. For more details about extreme self-focus, see ***Antisocial Personality Disorder*** on the ***Derangements*** sidebar, (p. 649).

Stormwarden/ Quantum Voyager (3 or 5 pt. Supernatural Merit)

Despite the fury of the Avatar Storm, some people remain immune. With this Merit (known as *Quantum Voyager* for Technocratic characters), you possess that precious rare immunity – the ability to reach through and travel beyond the Gauntlet without suffering the effects of the Storm.

For 3 points, your character can pass without harm through the Gauntlet. For 5 points, she can take everyone and everything she touches and desires to protect. Correspondence-based touching protects a warded character as well as a physical touch, but a person that the mage does *not* want to protect will suffer the usual Avatar Storm effects even if he happens to be touching her at the time.

Obviously, this Merit doesn't apply if the Avatar Storm never happened in your chronicle. This protection does not in any way protect against Disembodiment or other potential hazards of the Otherworlds. Under the **Mage Revised** metaplot, Stormwardens are incredibly rare – almost legendary – and fiercely hoarded by the Awakened groups.

Ties (3 pt. Social Merit)

You've got friends in high places, low places, or places in between. Maybe you know folks within the local police force, the gang scene, or an organized-crime cartel. Each type of Tie – a

Merit that must be purchased separately for 3 points per group – reflects a culture in which your character has connections, goodwill, and a small amount of influence. These people are not your friends or servants (there are several Background Traits for that sort of relationship), but they might do the occasional favor for you.

In story terms, the Ties Merit grants your character certain connections. Game-wise, those connections lower the difficulty rolls in certain situations, depending upon what you're trying to do:

- Fulfill a subtle request (pulling a license number, score some goodies, get an invite to some exclusive function, etc.): -2 difficulty
- Request a significant favor (plant a news story, spread a rumor, tamper with evidence, etc.): -1 difficulty

Your character must have some story-based reasons for those ties – membership in the group, family legacy, favors owed to him, and so forth – and will need to maintain them. Actions that could hurt his relationship with the group might destroy this Merit too. The Storyteller can deny certain types of Ties to player characters and has the final say about whether or not the connections will do what the character requests.

As mentioned above, different Ties must be purchased separately; each one costs 3 points. Potential Ties include: Local Police, Local Underworld, National Police, Organized Crime Cartel, Local Media Outlet, National Media Outlet, Black Market, Drug Trade, Hollywood, Interpol, Club Scene, Paparazzi, Local Journalism, Evangelical Community, Terrorism Underground, Counterterrorism Network, International Journalism, Corporations, and so forth.

Berserker/ Stress Atavism (4 pt. Mental Merit or Flaw)

Folks don't like you when you're angry. In combat, you become a veritable monster, destroying everything and everyone in sight. In certain ways, this is a blessing, in others, a curse – for although your dedication to slaughter has undeniable benefits, it's also a distinct liability... especially if you belong to a group that prizes discipline rather than brutality.

As both a Merit and a Flaw, this Trait has the same effects: under intense stress (combat, injury, disgrace, the death or crippling of a comrade, and so forth), the red haze kicks in. A failed Willpower roll (difficulty 8) leads to a berserk rampage. Your character gains three temporary Bruised health levels, ignores wound penalties, and adds two dice to her Strength and one die to her Stamina until every enemy within easy reach or sight is dead or incapacitated.

That's the good part; the bad part is that *everyone* becomes your enemy. Allies, enemies, and bystanders alike all look like targets until the blood-trance fades. Magick and strategic thinking become impossible, and your character uses every weapon in her hands for maximum carnage. Unless someone knocks her unconscious, incapacitates or kills her, or simply leaves her alone for several minutes (during which time she destroys everything within reach), she remains stuck in kill mode.

Is this a Merit or a Flaw? That depends. If your character belongs to a group that prizes bloodlust and has the luxury of mass murder in the modern world (that is, she's a shock-troop "cleaner" or an elite warrior for a wetwork organization), then it's a Merit; if she belongs to a group that demands subtlety, control, and restraint, then it's a definite Flaw. Either way, your character is the loosest of cannons – aimed in a convenient direction and then left alone to burn out or explode.

Umbral Affinity (4 pt, Supernatural Merit)

Something in your background grants you an innate affinity for the Otherworlds. Perhaps you have some distant relation to shapeshifter blood, or a Pagan heritage that links you to the oldest of Old Ways. Whatever the source might be, you can travel further and longer in the Otherworlds than most mortal humans can manage.

Game-wise, your character suffers no ill effects from first- and second-degree ***Acclimation*** (see Chapter Nine, pp. 482-483), and all other stages affect her at one stage less than usual. Beyond that, the character does not need to worry about Disembodiment until six full moon-cycles (roughly six months) have passed. In general, the character feels at home in most strange Umbral Realms, and she might be recognized as a natural traveler who has an innate right to be there.

Too Tough to Die (5 pt. Physical Merit)

You're badass enough to shrug off injuries. They still *harm* you, but they don't *stop* you. Game-wise, this Merit allows your character to soak lethal damage – *NOT* aggravated damage. Story-wise, those gunshots, knife wounds, broken bones, and so forth still tear your character up – he's not bouncing shotgun rounds off his chest. By soaking the associated health levels, however, your character can push on through wounds that would cripple or kill most folks.

Lethal injuries require the usual amount of time to heal. *Soaking* is not *healing*. If the Storyteller decides to use the ***Cinematic Damage*** option (Chapter Nine, p. 412), this Merit has no purpose and does not apply.

True Faith (7 pt. Merit)

Strong belief is essential for a mage. You, however, hold stronger beliefs than usual. Possessing convictions in a greater outside power, you can channel that power for miraculous feats that go beyond mere magick.

Game-wise, your character has one dot of True Faith – a potent force, in the World of Darkness, that reflects devotion to a god or pantheon. Despite the usual association between Faith and Christianity, your character can belong to any sincere creed with an established moral code and historical legacy. (Sorry, but True Faith in postmodern satires like the Flying Spaghetti Monster does not count.) A Technocrat can hold

Optional Rule: Powers of True Faith

Folks who possess True Faith often perform other miracles. As an optional rule, the Storyteller may allow a character with that Merit to channel her convictions into a range of holy (or unholy) powers:

- **Conviction:** By invoking the strength of her character's convictions, the player can spend a point of Faith like a point of Willpower.
- **Healing:** By laying on hands, the character can try to heal another character even if she lacks the Life Sphere. A successful Faith roll, difficulty 6, heals one bashing or lethal health level, and two successes can heal one aggravated health level. A character with malignant True Faith can cause damage at the same rate.
- **Intercession:** By praying for another person, the character can stabilize a sick or dying person, forgive sins, act as a "phone call to God," or perform some other intercession between a character and the Powers that Be.
- **Penance:** A firm or compassionate lecture might get another character to repent his sins and offer remorse and penance to the appropriate Powers That Be. Game-wise, this might demand a contested roll of True Faith versus the offender's Willpower. The difficulty is the offender's Willpower, although additional social-feat rolls during the lecture can lower that difficulty for the character with Faith. If the evangelist succeeds, the sinner hesitates, breaks down, or otherwise expresses remorse and potential conversion.
- **Shielding:** When assaulted by fire, torture, or other attacks, a Faith-full individual can try to soak the attack with a True Faith roll. Each success adds to the character's soak roll, even against aggravated attacks, for one turn. At the Storyteller's discretion, a successful roll might protect the character entirely; flames, beasts, temptations, and other torments might be diverted by a strong display of Faith.
- **Transmutation:** With a successful Faith roll, the character can transmute water to wine, turn fire to air, negate the effects of poison, or perform other miracles even if she lacks the Matter or Forces Spheres. Essentially, that character's gods direct their powers through their chosen one, displaying their powers over Earthly phenomena.

The Storyteller can, of course, create other miracles that suit the nature of the character and her chosen powers. As mentioned elsewhere, such miracles come from that higher power – that is, the Storyteller – not from the player. She can declare what she'd like to have happen, but the final manifestation of Faith... or lack of that miracle... is the Storyteller's call. Such acts – being miraculous, not magickal – do not invoke Paradox, even though they transcend Consensus Reality.

Levels of Faith

•	You might be able to drive away vampires with a prayer. (Faith roll, difficulty = vampire's Willpower.) Enemies of your faith feel uneasy in your presence. One die added to countermagick and Willpower rolls.
••	You can sense magick as if you had an Awareness Trait equal to your True Faith rating. If you already have Awareness, add this Trait to that dice pool. Your prayers can cause physical pain to a vampire or other powerful enemy of your faith. Two additional dice for Willpower and countermagick rolls.
•••	Intense devotion allows you to detect vampires or other supernatural beings whose essence is opposed to your creed. Such perceptions are intuitive, not perfect – you get feelings that suggest the presence of unclean things, rather than having an automatic Evil/ Goodness Detector. Night-Folk and mages whose nature opposes your Faith feel distinctly uncomfortable around you and generally try to corrupt you if possible, or escape you if not. Three additional dice for Willpower and countermagick rolls.
••••	Vampires cannot ghoul you, nor influence you with mind-altering Disciplines. Mages who try to sway you with Mind Sphere magicks add +2 to their difficulties. Your touch can burn powerful enemies of your creed (Faith roll, difficulty 7; one aggravated health level per success); and your prayers can harm enemies, or help allies, at the Storyteller's discretion. Four additional dice to Willpower and countermagick rolls.
•••••	An incarnation of everything good or bad about your creed, you drive opponents of your creed to their knees when you address their presence. Sinners weep in anguish when you pray; enemies must spend a Willpower point, flee when you approach, or make a Stamina roll each turn to remain in your presence. (Difficulty is 5 + the enemy's Intelligence Trait, because smarter enemies recognize how much they should fear you.) You can burn such enemies as above, or perhaps invoke other miracles at the Storyteller's judgment. Five additional dice to Willpower and countermagick. At this pinnacle, you're one short step away from your vision of Ascension.

True Faith too, although such Faith is pretty unusual. (See ***Technocratic Faith*, Chapter Five, p. 184.)** Even Marauders and Nephandi can possess True Faith, although the Fallen version of this Merit inverts the usual purity associated with True Faith. Such Faith adds one die per point to Willpower rolls, offers countermagick rolls (even for characters who cannot normally use countermagick), and might allow the character to employ other miraculous powers at the Storyteller's option.

Faith is no simple thing. It must be *lived* as well as recognized. A person with True Faith strives to be an exemplar of her creed, suffers crises of conviction, and might find herself losing the Faith entirely. Conversely, she can also grow into a paragon of her creed's virtues, embodying everything good (or evil) about her Path. Deeds in accord with that Faith strengthen or restore it, whereas acts opposed to the creed weaken this Merit. For a mage, such Faith is an innate part of her magickal focus – the two *must* be in alignment, because they both depend upon the same beliefs. Some people believe that mystics of the Celestial Chorus depend entirely upon True Faith and do not use True Magick at all. (For details about that option, see the **Revised Edition Tradition Book: Celestial Chorus**, pps. 63-65.) People who can see auras view True Faith as a shining corona of light... or a crackling storm of colors for malignant creeds. For details, see ***Aura Colors and Textures*** in **Chapter Ten**, **(p. 507)**.

True Faith costs 7 points per dot and may be purchased only during the character creation stage. Events within the chronicle can raise or lower it, at the Storyteller's discretion. People with True Faith are rare, and folks with Faith greater than 2 might as well be living saints. Again, a character must live, and perhaps die, by her convictions... a difficult thing, at times, for a mage, thanks to the compromises that a Path so often demands.

Flaws

Liabilities that plague a character at the most inopportune moments, Flaws offer extra freebie points during character creation. Even so, they're not only point-magnets; each Flaw presents a story-based challenge that must be faced and overcome throughout a character's life. Until and unless that Flaw gets bought off with experience points and some significant events within the chronicle, a Flaw remains a monumental pain in the ass for a mage, his companions, and the player who decides to take it.

Addiction (1 or 3 pt. Physical Flaw)

You're addicted to some activity or substance that interferes to some degree with your daily life. Perhaps you crave sex, drink constantly, or can't stop playing video games. Whatever the nature of the addiction, it drives you to irrational and possibly dangerous extremes. A harmless habit, after all, isn't really a Flaw.

The value of this Flaw depends upon the hazards of the addiction. A craving for some trivial enjoyment (games, tobacco, social media) is worth one point, but a drive to secure something illegal, dangerous, or both (cocaine, fight clubs, child porn, etc.) is worth three points. Severe addictions usually have a sense of moral wrongness about them as well, and they can cause social difficulties beyond the financial, legal, and physical and/ or psychological costs of the habit. The Flaw might come from any source – Ecstatic practices, psychological neurosis, physical compulsion, and so forth – that inspires deep-seated attachment to something troublesome.

Cursed (1 to 5 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Misfortune of apparently supernatural origins makes your character's life difficult; the more points the Flaw gives you, the greater the character's misfortune.

- (1 point) Minor quirks of fate. ***Examples:*** *You have a hard time keeping secrets; tech suffers tiny malfunctions in your presence; people tend to think ill of you.*
- (2 points) Small but annoying problems. ***Examples:*** *You stutter at inopportune moments; tires go flat and warning lights go on when you depend upon your car; expensive clothes wind up ruined by stupid accidents.*
- (3 points) Chronic misfortune. ***Examples:*** *Tools break when you use them; children fear you; red lights slow you down whenever you absolutely, positively need to be somewhere on time.*
- (4 points) Major problems arise. ***Examples:*** *People dislike you on principle; your greatest plans collapse for no predictable reason; your bank account keeps suffering unexpected withdrawals from sources that aren't you.*
- (5 points) Pervasive bad luck. ***Examples:*** *Your endeavors inevitably fail; tech never works the way it's supposed to function; chronic pain or poor health sap whatever vitality you possess.*

The Storyteller determines the eventual effects of your curse, as well as the methods you might use to lift it. In any case, the curse becomes a major part of your character's story and cannot be dispelled without some major effort on his part.

Echoes (1 to 5 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

You display some of the weird phenomena associated with sorcery. Maybe the air quivers with strange vibrations, or music plays without a visible source, or shadows gather in your presence. It could be that Resonance has marked you in noticeable ways... or perhaps your own beliefs send out vibrations too strong to ignore. Some curse or blessing might have marked you for favor or damnation.

This Flaw fits in well with certain Backgrounds (***Blessing***, ***Destiny***, ***Influence***, ***Totem***), and can be used as a simple rule system for Resonance if your group doesn't want to employ the optional rules associated with that phenomenon – see **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 560-561). In this case, one point in the Flaw could reflect a single dot in Resonance, with more points reflecting more points in that Trait. The flaw, under these circumstances, could go up and down; the player, however, gets freebie points *only* for the level of the Flaw at the beginning of the chronicle, and so the number of freebie points involved does not go up or down unless the character loses the Echoes Flaw completely.

As with other variable-cost Merits and Flaws, the different levels reflect increasing degrees of effect, their specific phenomena depending upon the mage and her overall temperament. The following five-level spectrum could complement the five dots of the ***Resonance/ Synergy Trait*** described in **Chapters Six** and **Ten**, showing the severity of the effects associated with really high levels of Resonance or Synergy.

- (1 point) Slight manifestations of no real consequence: perhaps your shadow flickers, milk sours in your presence, or a vague scent that's appropriate to your nature follows in your wake.
- (2 points) Mild echoes cause noticeable effects: animals shy away from you or follow you around; you send out vibes that a sensitive person can notice; you feel profoundly uncomfortable around energies, symbols, locations, or people who're opposed to your kind.
- (3 points) People who know what to look for recognize you on sight... not simply as a mage, but as the *sort* of mage you are: plants bloom or wither in your presence; sounds or music echo through the air; holy or unholy symbols repulse you (possibly forcing you to make a Willpower roll to remain nearby).
- (4 points) You stand out in ways that even Sleepers notice: your shadow moves of its own accord; you don't cast reflections in mirrors or liquid; cold winds blow even in a still room. People who know traditional folklore might be able to disrupt your magicks if they know the proper legendary precautions to take, essentially performing countermagick with a successful Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty is the targeted mage's Arete Trait +3).
- (5 points) Reality shifts when you're around, rippling with paranormal energies: animals adore you or run away when you approach; people feel sick or energized when you stand near; environmental shifts – rain, cold, shadows, warmth, etc. – radiate outward from you. A person who knows the proper folklore can try to attack or repel you using traditional charms or counterspells, inflicting one lethal health level of damage for each success they win in a contested Willpower roll against you.

Enemy (1 to 5 pt. Social Flaw)

Someone hates your guts and will do whatever he, she, it, or they can do in order to make your life unpleasant. Game-wise, the value of the Flaw determines the strength and hatred of that enemy; a single point reflects a minor grudge from some inconsequential party, and five points represent the deadly plans of some powerful entity or group.

Construct (2 pt. Social Flaw)

You came from a lab, not from a womb. Perhaps you were grown in a Progenitor facility, woven from plants, shaped from the elements, or crafted from parts of dead bodies in some flesh-tinkerer's workshop. Whatever your origins, you don't truly fit in with natural-born humans. A combination of self-doubt and social alienation – or perhaps a sense that you're far better than your so-called peers – keeps you at arm's length from the human social realm.

In game terms, this Flaw inflicts penalties on social rolls in many situations; the specifics depend upon your origins, attitude, and company, but they'll impede your character in significant ways. You don't *need* to take this Flaw, incidentally, if your character is a construct. Those penalties reflect an artificial person who stands out in a crowd, not one who fits in comfortably with her world.

PTSD (2 to 5 pt. Mental Flaw)

Awful experiences have given you a hair-trigger response to certain situations. Anxiety, aversions, phobias, sudden rage... whatever the symptoms might be, this *post-traumatic stress disorder* acts as a protective shield against further harm. Unlike a derangement, this Flaw doesn't induce delusions – your character remains lucid enough. Still, her fears kick in at difficult, sometimes unpredictable, times, undermining every attempt at whatever passes for a normal life in the Awakened world.

As usual, the different levels of this Flaw manifest in various levels of severity:

- (2 points) Your PTSD conjures occasional nightmares and anxieties under certain rare circumstances (confronting ghosts, dealing with demons, entering the wilderness, and so forth).
- (3 points) The trauma triggers phobias or other strong reactions to more common situations (dealing with elders, facing financial difficulty, etc.).
- (4 points) Reactions become more extreme – near-panic, powerful aversion, rapid mood swings – and provocations become more common (gunshots, confrontations, raised voices, etc.).
- (5 points)Your PTSD kicks off major reactions – fight-or-flight panic, vivid flashbacks, moments of stark terror, incapacitating catatonia – in fairly common situations (sex, arguments, financial transactions, etc.). Even without the specific stimulus, you suffer from

nightmares, social anxieties, fear of common things, and other circumstances that could evoke the traumatic event(s).

Sadly common in the World of Darkness, PTSD reflects deep-seated pain caused by things that a person might not even recall. Combat, torture, accidents, poverty, sexual violation, domestic violence, parental abuse... anything that can destroy a person's sense of safety might cause PTSD. Despite its sometimes extreme nature, PTSD is a perfectly rational response to harm. Because of that, it can be difficult to treat successfully, even with advanced psychiatry or Mind-based magicks. In most cases, a person suffering from PTSD simply learns to live with the symptoms and avoid the triggers that can set off a reaction.

Deranged (3 or 5 pt. Mental Flaw)

You suffer from a lasting form of mental illness. Although a successful Willpower roll (Storyteller's option) might allow you to cope with the effects for a short time, this insanity lingers until and unless it can be cured... which also involves buying off the Flaw. An essential Flaw for Marauder characters (though it's not exclusive to the Mad), this Trait gives you one of the ***Derangements*** described in the sidebar of that name. This madness might also affect someone with a ***Genetic Flaw*** (see below), or who's been subjected to ***Room 101*** or ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** (see **Chapters Five** and **Nine**).

A minor 3-point derangement reflects a troubling but manageable level of insanity; the 5-point level, meanwhile, represents an intensity of madness that makes your character a danger to herself and everyone nearby, if only because she's a crazy person with the power of a mage.

Genetic Flaws

Organisms are complex. When you alter one aspect of a living thing, other aspects change in response. And so, *Genetic Flaws* – innate problems with altered or constructed organisms – crop up when mages make permanent changes to the Patterns of living things.

Each of the following Traits counts as one Genetic Flaw; these Traits don't share the usual point-based ratio that normal Flaws have. For each dot in the ***Enhancement*** Background **(see Chapter Six, pp. 312-313)**, a character must also take either one Genetic Flaw or one point of permanent Paradox **(see Chapter Ten, pp. 547-548)**. The same character can take a mixture of both – say, two Genetic Flaws and one permanent Paradox to balance out three dots in Enhancements. The same holds true for permanent changes with Life Sphere magicks; if Jennifer Rollins permanently raises her Stamina to 6, her player must either select one Genetic Flaw or else give the character a point of Paradox that never goes away.

Despite the name, Genetic Flaws may be psychological, supernatural, or mechanical. The character in question could be a cyborg, a sell-soul bound by devilish pacts, a servant enhanced by witchcraft, or even a non-human entity whose strange nature breeds certain Flaws. Whatever their origins,

Derangements

Magick tends to break your brain. And so, when mages or the people near them experience various traumas, those experiences often leave *derangements*: mental and behavioral challenges that impair the character and her relationship with the rest of the world.

Despite the crazy name, derangements don't necessarily turn a character into a raving loony-tune. Most times, a deranged character is simply a bit off-kilter by ordinary human standards. (The word means "out of alignment.") Still, these mental illnesses can cause profound difficulties, especially in their most extreme manifestations.

At low levels, such challenges simply become quirks; if they reach irrational degrees, though, derangements can become extraordinarily dangerous... especially when the person afflicted with a given derangement has the power to tear reality apart.

Amnesia

Locking out parts of her memory, a person suffering from amnesia doesn't necessarily forget who and where she is, but she *does* lose recollections that feel traumatic, unsafe, or unreal. Depending upon the igniting incident(s), the amnesiac might block out parts of her identity, forget certain people or places, blank out specific incidents, or function in a level of reality where the forgotten thing (a brother, a home, a missing arm) simply does not exist.

Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)

More commonly called *sociopathy* and *psychopathy*, ASPD reflects a pervasive disregard for societies or fellow organisms. Some folks compare this to a form of "emotional autism," wherein the affected person literally cannot comprehend the feelings of other people or understand the impact of her actions on the emotional lives of anyone outside herself. Essentially, a sociopath can lie, cheat, steal, manipulate people, make rash decisions, violate propriety, turn the social contract into confetti, and apparently feel no remorse for any of it. Characterized by a lack of connection to or compassion for other entities, ASPD provides a key element of the so-called *Dark Triad* personality disorder (as per the Merit of that name), largely because a sociopath doesn't give a shit about consequences... which can be intensely charming, so long as you're not in his way.

Bipolar Affective Disorder (BAD)

Also known as *manic depression*, bipolar illness swings a person from hyperactive manic states into depressive crashes. Occasionally, both states can exist at once, inspiring a mood of exuberant melancholy or agitated rage. Manic states tend to spark impulsive behavior, unrealistic expectations, and intense passions; depression saps energy, crushes self-esteem, and grinds motivation and confidence into black paste.

Dementia

A catch-all name for a variety of related illnesses, dementia inflicts hallucinations, delusions, perceptual alterations, disinhibition (lack of restraint, filters, and boundaries), unpredictable memory loss, personality changes, loss of language skills and physical coordination, and other debilitating afflictions. More commonly (and callously) known as *lunacy*, dementia ranges from minor but distressing quirks to significant personality shifts and full-blown irrationality.

Fugue

A person in a fugue state periodically disassociates herself from her identity and relationships, sometimes forgetting who she is/ was until she returns from that fugue state... probably in a very different situation than she had been in when that shift in identity began. Also known as *dissociative amnesia*, a fugue derangement compels a person to make drastic, unexpected separations. She'll drop her friends, leave her home, adopt a new personality, maybe forget who she had been before. Perhaps she'll return to her old self again... perhaps not. For many obvious reasons, this derangement tends to be pretty common among mages, who make abrupt changes in their lives and identities simply by virtue of who they are and what they do.

Some folks also use the term *fugue state* to describe people who completely withdraw their consciousness from the rest of the world. Although that's not the technical definition of such extreme dissociation (it's actually called *catalepsy* or *catatonic schizophrenia*), it's a common misnomer... and, especially in mages in Quiet Dreamscapes, it's notorious among the Awakened.

Megalomania

The name commonly applied to *narcissistic personality disorder*, megalomania inspires grand delusions, power fantasies, intense feelings of superiority, and an inflated sense of self-esteem. For obvious reasons, it's *really* common among mages, who truly *are* superior to most other people – the derangement simply makes that person even more self-absorbed than usual. Certain authorities distinguish megalomania from narcissism, however. As Bertrand Russell said, "The megalomaniac... wishes to be powerful rather than charming, and seeks to be feared rather than loved."

Derangements (Continued)

Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD)

In what might be seen as an advanced fugue state, a person with MPD consciously and/ or subconsciously constructs several different identities. Each identity can become quite distinct, with its own speech patterns, memories, behaviors, and even physical appearance. Also called *dissociative identity disorder* (DID), MPD could manifest anywhere from two separate identities to a dozen or more... especially when it's augmented with Life, Mind, Correspondence, or a mixture of the three. MPD can be extremely common among Marauders, but it's frighteningly common among other mages too... especially if a mage and his Avatar begin to switch places or merge identities.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Sometimes called *monomania*, OCD drives a person to anxious, repetitious, and often ritualistic behavior patterns. Essentially, a person with OCD fixates on intrusive doubts and fears – fixations she tries to banish by making sure that certain things are in order, even if they already *are*. Often seen as an attempt to control one's circumstances, OCD is especially common among ceremonial mages, technomancers, and mad scientists, thanks to the many things they do that really MUST be tightly controlled and perfectly organized.

Paranoia

In world full of enemies, paranoia seems like an appropriate response. At the point of derangement, however, those reasonable fears reach obsessive severity. A paranoid person sees plots and rivals *everywhere*, even among his friends. Trust becomes foolishness because no one *can* be trusted. And when someone really *is* out to get that character, the madness deepens to absurd proportions.

Game-wise, a paranoid character adds +1 to the difficulties of all his social rolls... possibly more than that if the people he's interacting with have given him any reason at all to be suspicious. He'll use every available method to safeguard himself from treachery, and he'll keep even his closest companions at what feels to him like a safe distance... typically through abrasive, possibly abusive, behavior. At extreme levels, a paranoid mage isolates himself in every manner possible... at which point, he's alone with the terrors in his head, which never truly go away.

Schizophrenia

For folks with the power to change reality – and who live, by default, on a different level of reality than most people do – schizophrenia is frighteningly close to everyday existence. As a derangement, however, the disconnection from reality becomes profoundly dangerous. Hallucinations, phantom voices and sensations, vicious quirks of mood and temperament, leaps of (il)logic that feel extreme even by Awakened standards... such symptoms make it difficult to tell where reality ends and insanity begins. For mages, schizophrenia is the road to Marauderdom... or, in extreme cases, becomes that Mad destination from which no mage can return.

these Flaws reflect complications that arise from major modification of a living organism's Pattern. Any character can take them as Paradox Flaws or basic, one-point Flaws. A handful of basic Flaws can be used as Genetic Flaws as well; if you choose that option, though, each Flaw counts as a single Genetic Flaw, even if the usual Flaw costs more than 1 point. Note that the ***Construct*** Flaw cannot also be taken as a Genetic Flaw – that Flaw already assumes a certain uncanny quality that Genetic Flaws reflect as well.

Physical Flaws

The following Flaws come in two varieties: uncanny physical *characteristics*, and *drawbacks* that involve physical ailments. Each different type counts as a separate Flaw.

Enhanced Strength

Characteristics: grossly muscular build; visibly tense muscle fibers; dense body mass; unusual weight (too much or too little) for build; unwieldy proportions; hypersteroidal physique.

Drawbacks: constant hunger; bad temper; pervasive irritability; chronic pain; heart trouble; bone disease.

Enhanced Dexterity

Characteristics: long fingers or limbs; nervous tics; freakish reflexes; restless motion.

Drawbacks: hypertension; restlessness; impatience with the slow clumsiness of everyone else; heart problems; hyperflexibility/ hypermobility syndrome; muscle pain; cancer.

Enhanced Stamina

Characteristics: expanded chest capacity; dense body structure; immunity to minor pain; imperviousness to most weather conditions.

Drawbacks: ravenous hunger; obesity; unusual weight and density for build; gray, pale, leathery or otherwise discolored or oddly-textured skin.

Enhanced Appearance

Characteristics: Uncanny beauty; musky scent; too-perfect features and/ or proportions; lack of blemishes, scars, or birthmarks.

Drawbacks: "plasticky" skin; micropores or no pores at all (increased sensitivity to heat, inability to sweat); excessive

sweating; hypersensitivity to climate or sensation; pheromone scent that's *too* attractive for your own good!

Enhanced Intelligence

Characteristics: baldness; intense/ clinical gaze; staring eyes; tendency to speak quickly.

Drawbacks: dyslexia/ dyscalculia; spaceyness; Asperger's Syndrome/ Autistic Spectrum Disorder; headaches; hypersensitivity to stimulation; nightmares; restlessness.

Enhanced Perception

Characteristics: slightly oversized eyes or ears; unusual eye color; nervous tics; propensity to notice things before anyone else does.

Drawbacks: hypersensitivity/ sensory overload; nervous tics; restless limb syndrome; hallucinations; trembling.

Mental and Social Flaws

Constructs, biomodded people, and otherwise altered folks are notorious for their personality quirks. Those quirks, in turn, often leave other people feeling uncomfortable. The following Flaws reflect common behavioral tendencies among the "more human than human" contingent.

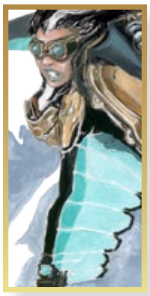
Genetic Flaws

Pedantic/ condescending personality; flashes of rage; chronic depression; arrogance; weird vibes; jerky/ robotic movements; eerie stillness; unnerving intensity; obsessive-compulsive behavior (taking notes about *everything*, making constant adjustments to or critiques about your environment); talking to yourself even when other folks are watching; treating everything like a computer game or reality TV show in which you're the star; Tourette's Syndrome; callousness or cruelty; intense self-focus; emotional extremes or apparent *lack* of emotions; the Dark Triad; breaking the fourth wall; a tendency to speak in a BBC accent even if you're not British.

Basic Flaws

Berserker/ Stress Atavism, Deranged, PTSD, and other appropriate mental or social Flaws.

The Toybox



The tools and toys we use often define human culture. That's especially true in the 21st century, where our tools have shaped a radically different world than the one previous generations knew – a world where climate control, rapid transit, information technology, mass media, and many other innovations guide the human animal. Our tools alter our reality, and so it's fitting that mages employ tools that fit their Path of choice.

As suggested by the ***Wonder*** Background in **Chapter Six**, the many tools of a mage's trade fall into different categories and levels of power. Some mages use an eclectic range of tools, and others wouldn't be caught dead with a jetpack or rune stick in their hands. The following section offers a brief glance into the Awakened toybox – a diverse collection of tools and trinkets whose value to the Awakened Ones reflects our own obsession with imaginative technology.

The following systems are, by necessity, brief and basic. For an expanded set of optional Wonder rules, see **The Book of Secrets**.

Rules for Wonders

With the exception of *Fetishes* and *Trinkets* (described below), Wonders are items that employ Sphere-based Effects in order to channel the reality-warping powers of a mage. That said, a character doesn't have to be a mage in order to use one; consors can employ mystic Wonders, extraordinary citizens can employ tech-based Devices, and the average Joe, Jane, or Janus could pick up a Trinket or Fetish and get results even if that person has no idea what the item actually is. **The Book of Secrets** goes into detail about the ways in which a person's paradigm allows her to use a Wonder (or forbids her from accessing its full abilities), but for now let's simply say that people get what they expect to get from a Wonder. If that person loathes technology, then a suit of power armor won't do her much good; if witchcraft seems silly, or is anathema, to her, then that flying broom ain't goin' nowhere.

Wonders and Paradox

Because they employ magick to alter reality, Wonders tend to generate Paradox. The amount of Paradox, however, relies upon whether a given item is considered *coincidental* or *vulgar* and whether Sleeper witnesses are present at the time of its use. A jetpack used around a military base at night won't generate nearly as much Paradox energy as a flying carpet zipping down Wall Street. In all cases, the amount of Paradox follows the rules detailed in **Chapter Ten**, **(pp. 547-553)**, with the points being added to the Quintessence/ Paradox wheel of the mage who's using the Wonder. **(See Chapter Six, (p. 331), for details about that wheel and its effects.)**

The Coincidental Edge

Fortunately, Wonders tend to make many vulgar acts seem rather coincidental. Especially in mass-media cultures, folks are more willing to accept weird stuff if there's a machine or similar object involved. For obvious reasons, this gives the coincidental edge to Wonders that involve some form of acceptable technology... which, in the 21st century, can get pretty advanced before people start questioning its viability! Even so, certain Wonders have strong footholds in the public imagination – a

cross, for example, brandished in the hands of a priest, or a fistful of colorful dust in the hands of a wild stranger – and might be considered coincidental under the right circumstances.

Silent Wonders

Certain Wonders have no discernable effects, so they rarely generate Paradox at all. A bulletproof hoodie, for instance, doesn't seem unusual, and its protective effect could be interpreted as sheer luck or bad shooting. Other Wonders function in very subtle ways. A flask that gets someone drunk immediately, or a bullet that shatters inside the body and then disappears, both use Sphere magick in ways that no normal eyes can see. Again, this sort of Wonder avoids Paradox unless some Sleeper witness notices impossible things going on.

Permanent Paradox

On the flipside, certain Wonders ripple the Consensus simply by existing. The ***Enhancement*** Background (described in **Chapter Six**) invokes that kind of permanent Paradox, and certain other things do as well. For the most part, permanent Paradox comes about through certain lasting modifications: moving tattoos, glowing horns, and the like. In general, assume that a Wonder that can be turned off or set aside does not generate permanent Paradox. If a Wonder *does* involve permanent Paradox, add that Paradox to the wielder's Quintessence/ Paradox wheel whenever he has that Wonder in his possession.. **(For details about Permanent Paradox, see that entry in Chapter Ten, pp. 547-548.)**

Essential Wonders

The basic set of Wonders includes the following types of items. Other sourcebooks include a wider array of Wonders, with specific rules and limitations for each type.

- **Device:** A sophisticated, self-powered item of Enlightened technology.
- **Fetish:** Capitalized, a power object containing a bound spirit entity.
- **Periapt:** A mystic source of Quintessence energy. A tech-based Periapt is called a **Matrix**.
- **Talisman:** A sophisticated, self-contained magickal item.
- **Trinket:** A single-function item that has been crafted or enhanced using Sphere magicks but that isn't magickal in the sense that other Wonders are magickal.

Using a Wonder

As a general rule, *Devices and Talismans* have their own Enlightenment/ Arete Trait, which determines the dice pool for the item's Effects. If Ryan uses a 4 Arete bafflejack, for example, his player rolls four dice to activate that Talisman's Effect.

A *Fetish* channels the power of a spirit within that item. To use one, the character asks the spirit to unleash its powers. Story-wise, this typically demands a decent relationship with the spirit in question; game-wise, the Storyteller might have the player make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) against the spirit's Gnosis Trait. A successful roll employs that Gnosis as the dice pool for the Fetish's effects, so a Gnosis 5 Fetish would have a five-die pool.

Periapts and Matrices simply store up Quintessence. Each item holds up to five points of Quintessence for each dot in that Wonder. Thus, a three-dot Matrix could hold a total of 15 Quintessence. To access that Quintessence, or to refuel the Wonder, a character uses a Prime 2 Effect, plus at least one turn of focused concentration, to channel Quintessence back into the Periapt. Without Prime of 2 or higher, a mage cannot employ such a Wonder.

Trinkets are easy to use, and pretty much anyone can do so. Jinx could put on a bulletproof hoodie and enjoy its protective effects without further skill or effort. Although such items – super-sharp blades, Prime-strengthened clothing, glass forged with Matter to become damn near unbreakable – require Sphere Effects when they're being crafted, their properties remain intact unless some other force (like unweaving countermagick) destroys them.

Crafting Wonders

The ***Crafting Wonders chart*** in **Chapter Ten**, **(p. 508)**, shows the basic systems involved in creating these enchanted items. In order to craft a wonder, *the character must have all of the necessary Spheres*. Consequently, you need to be a pretty accomplished mage before you can create a new Wonder from scratch.

Wonder-crafting also involves mundane elbow grease. Dr. Hans von Roth, for example, needs to know a lot about cars before he can build his scrappy hotrods, and he must put in some serious hours in the garage, tinkering with car parts both standard and original. Game-wise, the character should have all the requisite Abilities, as well. To craft the Wonder, the player makes a variety of extended rolls, as detailed in **Chapter Nine**'s section about ***Inventing, Modifying, and Improving Technology***.

Quintessence Costs

Wonder does not come cheap. Beyond the materials involved in the creation of such items (which, in most instances, must be high-quality materials whose symbolic significance fits the Wonder in question), a mage must invest at least five points of Quintessence into the Wonder for each dot in the Wonder's Background rating. A three-dot Wonder, for example, would require no less than 15 Quintessence, and a five-dot Wonder would need at least 25.

Devices and Talismans also require one point of Quintessence for each roll the player makes while crafting the item, beyond the basic Quintessence points required for that item. If Dr. von Roth's player needs to make five rolls while crafting a four-dot flying Prius, then the car requires a total of 25 Quintessence points (five rolls at 5 Quintessence each = 25 Quintessence). The source of that Quintessence, like the mundane materials involved, depends a lot on the nature of that Wonder. A sharp tux designed by Vittoria Falconi would demand some especially cold cash or other Primal Utility investment, but a Balath-Qada Madness Grenade might employ scraps of depleted uranium from

an Iraqi bomb crater, corpse-dust from a serial killer's basement, and the charred scraps of a shredded Ann Coulter screed.

Background Costs

As described in the ***Wonder Background entry*** in **Chapter Six** (p. 328), Wonders get rated by their overall power level:

- • Minor item worth 1-2 freebie or experience points.
- •• Notable item worth 2-4 points.
- ••• Significant item worth 5-6 points.
- •••• Impressive item worth 7-8 points.
- ••••• Mighty item worth 9-10 points.

An individual Wonder can have up to one separate power for each dot in that Background. A three-dot Wonder, for instance, can have up to three different powers, although many three-dot Wonders have only one or two abilities.

Because each Wonder uses Sphere-based Effects, those dots depend upon the Sphere Rank of the object's most powerful Effect. A Talisman, for instance, that uses a Forces 4/ Prime 4 Effect would be a four-dot Background, its Arete Trait as high as 4.

As an *optional rule*, a Wonder may have a higher Arete than usual; for one extra Background point, that four-dot Talisman could have an Arete of 5. Generally, Wonders have a capacity of five Quintessence points for each point of Arete. That four-dot Arete 5 Talisman, then, could hold up to 25 Quintessence and would cost nine freebie or experience points.

Points and Requisitions

The ***Requisitions Background*** (see Chapter Six, p. 321-322) gives Technocratic characters a range of points with which they can temporarily buy gear from their division. That gear doesn't actually belong to those operatives, but, by pooling those points, the Background allows teams of Union agents to obtain vehicles, weapons, and other goodies that are usually way above their pay grade.

Sample Wonders

Each of the following Wonders features a dot rating that represents its Background value if your character happens to own such a thing, a point cost in case someone wants to buy that item with freebie or experience points, and the essential systems and descriptions that deal with that particular Wonder. You can use these items "straight out of the box," take them as inspirations for your own original creations, or stick them in the hands of supporting-cast characters when an ally or villain needs a little extra edge. **The Book of Secrets**, **The Technomancer's Toybox**, **Guide to the Technocracy**, **Forged by Dragon's Fire**, and a variety of other **Mage** sourcebooks provide dozens of additional Wonders, and although the rules and formats of those other books aren't always consistent with the rules in **Chapter Ten** (much less with one another...), the many concepts in those books can help you fill your **Mage** chronicle with Wonders of all kinds.

Mystic Wonders

Favored by mages dedicated to a mystic Path, these tools blend the mystique of traditional magic items with the realities of our present century.

• to ••• Trushades (Trinket)

Arete N/A, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 2-6 pts.

In a simple, yet potentially powerful, variation on the old "X-ray specs" concept, many mages keep glasses or goggles that have been modified with between one and three perceptual Effects. The name *Trushades* comes from a variety marketed to Awakened customers by Greer Laboratories – a cabal composed of Ecstatic, Etherite, and VA mages whose slogan is "Look closer." Other, generic varieties exist under many different names. Although such shades – which range from simple reading glasses or sunglasses to stylish shades and wild eyewear – look perfectly normal, their enhancements allow the wearer to view things no human eyes should be able to see.

System: Depending upon the Spheres involved, a pair of Trushades can employ any Rank 1 visual perception Effect. The most common variations incorporate Forces (electrons or other physical energies), Life (overall health and the presence of life), Matter (the structure of inanimate items and surfaces), Mind (auras), and Prime (Quintessence and Resonance/ Synergy forces), but really – any visually perceivable Sphere works.

Generally, a pair of modified glasses also features an activation word or touch; this way, the wearer can turn the Effects on and off at will. A one-dot pair holds a single Effect, and the three-dot sets feature three different Spheres working toward a single purpose. Three Spheres, however, is the maximum capacity for a non-Talisman pair of glasses... and any character who tries to use all three Spheres at once will suffer both a -2 penalty to her Perception rolls and a nasty (though non-injurious) headache.

•• or ••• Bafflejack (Device or Talisman)

Arete 2-5, Quintessence 10-25, Background Cost 2 to 6 pts.

In a world of perpetual surveillance, folks have all the more reason to hide their private lives. That's especially true of mages, who – regardless of their faction – have all too much to lose if information about their true lives gets into the wrong hands. And although all occult (that is, hidden) groups have 21st-century variations on this theme, the bafflejack favored by activist Tradition mages might be the most popular self-concealment measure in current circulation.

Depending upon who crafted and uses specific bafflejacks, these tiny Talismans and Devices could be items of jewelry (watches, cufflinks, rings, necklaces, etc.), clothing (shoes, scarves, jackets, and so forth), glasses, hats, pins, and so on. "Bafflejacking" has also become slang for a popular process through which a mage treats an object so that it holds the same properties as a bafflejack Wonder – essentially turning that object *into* a bafflejack.

So what's a bafflejack, and what does it do? It's an ordinary-seeming item that sends out small ripples of light-, sound-, and mind-disruption. When worn, or clipped onto something that's supposed to be concealed, a bafflejack emits a low-level cloaking effect. Although this cloaking doesn't keep the object or wearer from being seen and heard, it *does* tend to scramble the precise impression that person or object leaves upon witnesses, electronic surveillance monitors, and cameras and microphones of all kinds.

Because of that disruptive effect, though, bafflejacks tend to screw with electronic devices as a whole – which is a nasty side effect if you want to use electronic gear, drive a car, or go online. The Virtual Adepts (and certain Technocrats) craft bafflejacks that can interact selectively with electronic equipment, but those 'jacks are far more difficult to come by (and, in game terms, more expensive). However, for protests, getaways, clandestine meetings, and other events, a bafflejack might be *the* must-have accessory for postmodern mages on the go.

System: A simple yet useful combination of Forces 2 Effects shifts the spectra for light, sound, and electrons where they interact with the surface of the person or object cloaked by the bafflejack. Meanwhile, a related Mind 2 Effect blurs the perceptions of people who interact with the protected party.

Essentially, the bafflejack acts like several removable dots in the Arcane Background. People, machines, and intelligent animals (that is, animals able to be affected by the Mind Sphere) all suffer a -1 penalty to their Perception rolls for each success on a roll of the Wonder's Arete, difficulty 7. (For simplicity, your Storyteller could just decide that this Wonder provides an automatic Arcane 3, saving the roll for drastic circumstances.) Bafflejacks with higher Arete Traits bestow higher levels of protection. Again, the user is neither silent nor invisible; impressions of that character, though, will be rather indistinct, and various people will recall his features and activities differently.

A two-dot bafflejack holds two Effects: some combination of the electronic baffling, the mental baffling, the light-baffling, and the sound baffling. The three-dot version holds three, and the four-dot 'jack baffles all four. Each point of Quintessence fuels the baffling Effects for one hour. Obviously, the Technocracy has sensors that can detect the Effects of a bafflejack; those sensors are too expensive to place everywhere, but sensitive security zones can spot a bafflejack on a roll of five dice against difficulty 5.

••• Bulletproof Hoodie (Trinket)

Arete N/A, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 6 pts.

Crafted in reaction to the increase of racist shootings and ethnic violence, these paranormal fashion statements have begun appearing on the backs of young and not-so-young mages all over the industrialized world. Such hoodies tend to feature stylish logos (often in a modern graffiti style), occult designs, or outspoken political sentiments, though some

default to a single, solid color – typically black, gray, red, or blue. And although they're not truly bullet-*proof*, the hoodies can deflect all kinds of major trauma, so long as such trauma hits between the wearer's waist and (if the hood is up) the top of his head. For obvious reasons, such hoodies are especially popular with orphans, Hollowers, urban shamans, and mages of commonly-attacked ethnicities.

System: Matter 3 strengthens the fibers of these garments without adding noticeably to their weight. In game terms, a bulletproof hoodie provides four soak dice versus lethal slashing or projectile damage. Such hoodies do not protect against blunt trauma – only against blades, bullets, arrows, and so on. Still, a punch is easier to walk away from than a bullet, so the folks who wear these garments aren't concerned about that particular limitation.

Technocratic Hardware

Crafted in the factories of the Technocratic Union, these tools help reinforce the Union's dedication to futuristic technology, Inspired Science, and a world freed from the shackles of superstitious fear. The various Technocracy sourcebooks contain dozens of other hardware items, although the '90s-era ones seem rather out of date by now.

•• Falconi & Associates Elite Business Attire (Device/ Invention)

Enlightenment special, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 4 pts.

Impressions are everything, especially in the realm of high finance, media, and government. And although Armani suits retain their traditional allure, the *real* power draping today's thrones comes from the studios of Vittoria Falconi, the most inspired (and Inspired) designer in the world today. Whereas other fashionistas play games of petty popularity, Falconi and her world-class artisans craft the finest, most subtle suits an executive could ever hope to wear. Their work is stratospherically expensive, of course... but then, the best things never come cheaply.

Falconi and her collaborators – Holly Tanaka, Indira Chen, Enrique Castaneda, and Florian Wulff – employ Inspired Science and Enlightened Arts to craft 21st-century business fashion. Covert operatives of the Technocratic media elite, these artisans have surpassed the Savile Row Old Guard. These days, a real player orders his or her suits from Falconi or Tanaka, gets shoes from Castaneda & Chen, and books personal style consultations with Florian Associates. Together, their creations shape the power elite of the new millennium: assured, stylish, charismatic, and yet not in any way stuffy or old-fashioned. These suits reflect a grand global vision, rich with subtle tones of cross-cultured aristocracy... and, of course, Enlightened power too.

The ties between Falconi, Tanaka, and the others remain a trade secret worth killing for. Only the tiniest ring of their collective inner circles knows (much less understands) the significance of Eris Design, an invisible umbrella that unites those designers into a cooperative whole. The various creations from Falconi and her associates interact to provide an impressive yet practical fashion suite: impeccable clothing, fascinating cosmetics, comfortable yet stylish footwear, and a range of benefits that only Enlightened operatives can truly utilize.

System: *Anyone* looks good in Falconi or Tanaka suits; a character dressed by these fashion artisans can reduce the difficulty of social rolls by -3, thanks to the stylish impression he presents. The clothing acts as ***Reinforced Clothing*** armor, worth two extra soak dice against bashing and lethal damage attacks, but it has no additional weight or bulk. The tailored lines of a Falconi or Tanaka suit also conceal all but the largest handguns or knives, and the clothing features tiny hidden pockets that can hold cards, wallets, and so forth without breaking the line of the suit. Thanks to superior craftsmanship (and Matter-enhanced materials), these clothes rarely tear, stain, fade, fray, or retain unpleasant odors, even under the harshest of conditions.

An Enlightened character can also use a built-in Mind 2 **Empathic Bond** Effect. The dice pool for this Effect comes from the wearer's own Enlightenment Trait, which makes a high-end Syndicate VP far more impressive than a low-level street op.

When enhanced by Florian makeovers, a character gets an additional two dice of Charisma, thanks to the combination of poise, cosmetics, and confidence (plus a tiny Mind Sphere Adjustment) that Florian and his specialists employ.

Castaneda & Chen shoes do not slip, break, blister, impede running, or lose traction on tricky surfaces. Although they definitely look good, these shoes lack the built-in social adjustments of other Falconi-associated clothing. Instead, they simply function as superior footwear that an operative can wear all day, under almost any conditions, without undue discomfort or risk.

Combined, an outfit composed of all Falconi-associated brands can cost upwards of $50,000. The high price is part of the magick too – it confers value in the minds of its purchasers. Such outfits never come off the rack. Each one is carefully tailored and calibrated for the person it's designed to suit. Hence, such fashions define the elite – after all, only the elite can afford them!

••• Visual Data & Analysis Spectrum (VDAS) (Device)

Enlightenment 3-6, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 6 pts.

Known by the colloquialism *the datacrawl* and commonly pronounced *vee-DAS*, the VDAS allows a Technocratic field agent to access the Union's databases for information. A faint green crawl of data (typically rendered in abbreviations and measured in the metric system) appears at the lower left side of the agent's vision when the agent sends a mental impulse to trigger the crawl. See this book's **Prelude** for a description of the VDAS in action and the sidebar ***VDAS: The Datacrawl*** in **Chapter Five**, (p. 182), for further details about the technology.

System: Essentially, this Device functions like the ***Right-Click*** rote detailed in **Chapter Ten**, (pp. 602-603). The agent might have VDAS implanted as a cybernetic interface, or she might wear it

as part of her field gear. The worn-gear option allows the agent to take VDAS off, which offers some measure of freedom and reflects a degree of trust on the Union's part. An agent wearing the VDAS can be tracked, even if the interface has been turned off, so an agent who has the option of taking off her gear has been granted some level of autonomy by her supervisors.

In order to use VDAS, the character must be trained in its proper use. The combination of mental-impulse command and multitasking that lets someone use this Device requires Mind 1 and a short, yet essential, training program. Without that training and a correct understanding of Technocratic paradigms, a person who puts on VDAS gear would see nothing unusual; without Mind 1, that person would see a crawl of green data on the surface of the lens but could not read it without massive amounts of eyestrain and distraction. Either way, VDAS gear has a Correspondence/Data implant in its technology. The Technocracy can track a character wearing it unless she has somehow disabled the tech (as Secret Agent John Courage obviously has), which demands an extensive knowledge of classified Union technology.

VDAS technology is standard issue for Black Suits and cyborgs. Other agents may requisition it, or be assigned that technology, on an as-needed basis. Thanks to Google Glass and other similar Sleeper technology, VDAS is coincidental... though not, as the ***Right-Click*** description reveals, always reliable.

•••• Alanson R-25 Hardsuit (Device)

Enlightenment 4, Primal Energy 20, Background Cost 8 pts.

Among the standard gear for Iteration X monster-hunters, an Alanson R-25 Hardsuit provides strong yet flexible protection. With a few small modifications, an Alanson suit can be adapted to low-G environments, alternative dimensions (aka the Umbra), aquatic theatres of operation, and standard Earth ground settings. A hypertech variation on modern military body armor, the Alanson has stealth technologies, variable weapon mounts, life-support attachments, infrared and ultraviolet viewing apparatus, stim-pack receptacles (to provide much-needed, albeit temporary, boosts), and a light yet formidable level of protection.

Since the first Alanson units rolled off the assembly lines at the turn of the millennium, the original bulky armor has gained protective capabilities and slimmed its formidable profile. Current-generation hardsuits weigh about 30 pounds (less than half of the original 70), offer better armor, and lack the shutdown flaw of earlier designs. An agent in an R-25 unit still has an imposing silhouette, but the newest-generation armor can be concealed beneath a long coat if the agent removes the helmet. Thanks to the Age of Terror and its subsequent prevalence of armored police and military forces, the average Sleeper would regard an Alanson-suited operative as a cop or soldier in really cool gear.

System: A compact network of form-fitting composite-material armor, micro-servos, a body-stocking, and a selection of modular kits that can be switched out within a turn or two (assuming that the user has access to the various modules, of course; each module costs extra points) allows an Alanson-suited agent to employ the following abilities:

- **Armor:** Seven additional soak dice of protection shield the character from bashing, lethal, and aggravated damage. The bulk of the suit and servos reduces the wearer's Dexterity-based dice pools by two dice, and he must be wearing the helmet in order to get the full protection for his head.
- **Strength:** Those internal servos add two dice to the wearer's Strength-based dice pools, except for feats that involve jumping or running. The agent can run a maximum of 20 yards per turn, and that level of activity quickly strains his muscles even with the help of the suit. (Assume one turn of running per dot of Stamina.)
- **Temperature Control:** Internal heating and cooling units keep the wearer relatively comfortable in temperatures ranging between 0 and 110 degrees Fahrenheit (-18 to 45 degrees Celsius).
- **Hard Fists:** The suit's reinforced gloves and boots add one die to the damage of all weaponless strikes. That damage, without weapons, inflicts bashing-style harm. Concealed blades can be deployed within the gloves, making that damage lethal instead.
- **Integrated Communications Interface (ICI):** Assuming that the agent's wearing his helmet, each Alanson hardsuit has radio, Internet, VDAS, GPS, telephone, and video capability.
- **Cross-Environment Life Support System (CELSS) (3 pts.):** When fitted with an enclosed helmet and an integrated life-support pack, the hardsuit can sustain its operator in hazmat, underwater, deep cold, intense heat, and Deep Umbral environments. Each hour of operation costs one point of Quintessence. Such use is coincidental but not concealable.
- **Enhanced Targeting Capacity (ETC) (4 pts.):** After spending a turn engaging the ETC system, the operative can add four dice to distance-attack dice pools, thanks to the targeting-and-guidance computer interface.
- **Heavy Armor (1 pt.):** With a layer of reinforced plating, the suit gains three additional levels of protection (three soak dice, or 10 dice total), at the cost of reduced mobility (10-yard run) and increased bulk (three-die penalty to Dexterity-based rolls).
- **High-Intensity Plasma Assault Unit (HIPAU) (9 pts.):** A removable weapons system allows the operative to aim his arm and generate a blast of hot, focused, plasmic death. Each shot consumes a point of Quintessence. The player rolls a Dexterity + Energy Weapons attack, which acts as the focus instrument for a six-die Forces 3/Prime 2 attack. This blast of energy inflicts aggravated damage. Outside of Technocracy Constructs or the Otherworlds, the HIPAU constitutes a vulgar Effect.

- **Nanotech Self-Repair Module (NSRM) (3 pts.):** With a successful Enlightenment roll (difficulty 7), the suit can temporarily repair itself. Full repairs must be made back at headquarters, but the nanotech patch kit can fix minor damage within a few minutes and major damage in an hour or two. On a botched roll, however, the systems go amok, wrecking the suit's integrity within a minute or two. The agent inside the suit had best get out of it quick; otherwise, she could find herself trapped inside it... or possibly – if she's been injured as well – integrated *into* the suit through various unpleasant "repairs."

- **Self-Contained Emergency Medical System (SCEMS) (4 pts.):** If the operative deploys the "seams," advanced drugs and medical nanites conduct biopatch healing. Each use expends one Quintessence point. The player rolls four dice (the module's Enlightenment) against difficulty 6 to trigger the SCEMS' Life 2 **Heal Self** Effect – an Effect that remains coincidental so long as the operative isn't reattaching limbs or hauling his guts back into place.

- **Standardized Primal Energy Containment Matrix (SPECM) (5 pts. each):** Removable Primal Energy units allow the suit to carry and utilize an additional 10 points of Quintessence. One suit can accommodate two SPECM units.

Other than the functions of certain vulgar modules, the Alanson hardsuit remains coincidental in tech-based reality zones. A lone operative needs about six turns to put the suit on or take it off, but he needs only half that time if he's got a trained assistant to help him into or out of the armor. Because it's an independent Device, any Technocracy-trained operative – Enlightened or otherwise – can use it. For obvious reasons, however, only the most trusted extraordinary citizens merit hardsuit training. These suits are far too expensive for common deployment.

Biotech

The remarkable treasures of hypertech bio-integration allow certain characters – usually, but not always, agents of the Technocratic Union – to employ cybernetic and genegineered biotech Wonders. Unlike other Wonders, these modifications cannot be removed except through agonizing (and often fatal) surgery. Essentially, man, magick, and machine become one entity. The ***Enhancements Background*** (pp. 312-313) represents those modifications, and several character templates in **Appendix I** feature a few examples of its applications in action.

Contrary to the stereotypes of bulky exojocks and murderous HIT Marks, most biomodded personnel conceal their modifications until those improvements are needed. That's especially true in the 21st century, when the state of the art has been refined far past the clunky applications of the previous century. This refinement, combined with the adaptation of mundane prosthetics among the Masses, renders all but the wildest examples of biotech more or less coincidental in the industrialized world. Unless some dude suddenly pops blades or a machine gun out of his hand, people are likely to accept subtle biotech as legitimate advancements of science.

(Biotech enhancements still add one point of permanent Paradox to the character for each dot in his Enhancements Background Trait. These days, however, people are less likely to freak out at the sight of mechanical devices worked into living tissue. After all, the recent wars have done a lot to advance the science of prosthetics. How distressingly convenient...)

Cybernetics

As mentioned in the appropriate entries in **Chapter Ten**, simple cybernetics serve as instruments and practices for hypertech procedures. (See p. 576 and 579.) Thus, many characters employ minor cybernetic adjustments too subtle for the Enhancements Background.

Cybernetics as Advantages

Such small pieces of technology could simply be considered focus instruments or special effects for *Advantages* like Armor, Claws, Nightsight, or Rapid Healing. (See the sidebar.) In this case, the player should simply buy the Advantage, define the tools, or both; add one dot of the Enhancements Background for every two points spent on the Advantage; and then consider those devices built-in cybernetic biomods. Those Traits and that equipment would then be subject to the conditions mentioned below – the potential for removal, the permanent Paradox, the susceptibility to Life magick, and so forth. Aside from that, however, you don't need a separate Wonder entry for claws... unless, of course, they're really *special* claws. More powerful cybernetic Wonders, though, have their own entries below.

Cybernetic biomods have several special conditions within **Mage**:

- **Self-Contained Energy:** Every piece of cybernetic hardware operates off a self-contained battery of Primal Energy. Minor enhancements (the ***Advantages*** described in the sidebar nearby) can operate indefinitely off the character's personal Quintessence, but larger ones use batteries. Game-wise, the Primal Energy rating of a cybernetic device reflects the size of its Quintessence battery. If that battery runs down, the cyborg can fuel the device with his personal Quintessence – his life force – until he's out of Quintessence. At that point, the cybernetics shut down and go offline until the Primal Energy gets restored one way or another.

- **Activation:** Unless they've been purchased as Advantages (again, see sidebar), cybernetic devices have an Enlightenment rating. To activate a device, the player rolls that Enlightenment as a dice pool. The difficulty depends upon whether those cybernetics are coincidental (a subdermal pouch) or vulgar (a plasma cannon). Failure on that roll means that the device does not function at all, and a botch reflects some calamitous malfunction... and probably a Paradox backlash as well. In any case, vulgar Effects and botched rolls add to the cyborg's Paradox pool, which might already be significant...

Optional Rule: Advantages

Certain characters have innate yet unusual features: claws, wings, natural armor, and so forth. In system terms, such features are called *Advantage Traits*. Although the extensive details and systems surrounding Advantages go far beyond the scope of this book, cybernetics, genegineering, and biomods can give certain Advantages to characters with the appropriate Enhancements.

Like most other Traits, Advantages cost points. The basic characteristics of certain Advantages and the associated point costs appear below. For more details about Advantages, see the **Mage 20** sourcebook **Gods, Monsters and Familiar Strangers**.

Advantage	Point Cost	System
Armor	variable	One soak die per point spent vs. bashing and lethal damage; one soak die vs. aggravated damage for every two points spent.
Claws, Fangs, or Horns	3/5/7	***Claws*** inflict Strength +2 slash; ***fangs*** inflict Strength +1 bite; ***horns*** inflict Strength +2 gore. Three points buy one attack, five buy two, and seven buy all three. Normal cost inflicts lethal damage. Double cost inflicts aggravated damage.
Climbing Pads/ Claws	2	-2 difficulty to all climbing rolls (minimum of 2).
Nightsight	3	Allows for a sense that "sees" in near-total darkness, no roll needed. Perception + Alertness, difficulty 8, allows character to "see" in complete darkness.
Rapid Healing	variable	Every two points spent on Advantage moves character one category higher on ***Healing Damage chart***.
Wings	3/5	Three points let character fly up to 13 yards/ turn. Five points let character fly up to 20 yards per turn.

- **Permanent Paradox:** As mentioned earlier, each dot in the Enhancement Background bestows a point of permanent Paradox. Enlightened characters add those points to their Paradox Effect backlashes. UnEnlightened characters with cybernetic implants suffer weird quirks and chronic health issues (see *Genetic Flaws*, pp. 648-651) and contribute to the overall backlash total when an allied mage suffers a Paradox backlash. Yes, this means that an Enlightened Technocrat surrounded by unEnlightened cyborgs can be really fucked if Paradox kicks in.

  A large Paradox backlash (10 points or more) drains all of the Primal Energy out of the cybernetic devices and kicks them offline until someone finds a new source of energy for them.

- **Extraction:** Cybernetic enhancements are machines, and machines can be removed. If a cyborg character winds up Incapacitated or otherwise immobilized, he might get chopped if his captors are skillful or ruthless enough to do so. In game terms, a skillful character has several dots in Biotech, Hypertech, Medicine, or Science (Cybernetics). An unskilled character could just use a chainsaw.

  Assume that a character whose cybernetics have been ganked loses one permanent health level for each dot of Enhancements. Three dots' worth of cybernetics, then, would inflict three health levels' worth of damage if removed. Such removal inflicts aggravated damage that cannot be healed without significant restoration magick or medical treatment. Certain organs or improvements, of course, might prove immediately fatal if removed. As one might imagine, the threat of extraction keeps most Technocratic cyborgs in line.

- **Magickal Vandalism:** Despite the Technocracy's best efforts, the awful power of the Spheres allows a skillful mage to take cyborgs apart. A vulgar Life 3/ Forces 2/ Prime 2 Effect can disrupt cybernetic devices if the mage knows what she's doing – in game terms, the four Traits listed directly above this entry. If that mage rolls five successes or more, the poor cyborg goes offline until a repair tech can sort things out. Quite often, he remains conscious even while trapped in his malfunctioning body – a nightmarish fate that haunts each cybernetic Ascension Warrior.

- **Implant Rejection:** An even more gruesome fate involves the wholesale rejection of cybernetic devices. A vulgar Life 3 (or Life 3/ Matter 2) spell inflicts two additional health levels in aggravated damage if the spell gets past a cyborg's countermagick. The cyborg cannot soak this damage in any way. A single assault that deals out six health levels or more actually rips the cybernetics out of the character's body – a brutally effective tactic when faced with enhanced antagonists.

- **Non-Technocratic Cybernetics:** Although other factions have cybernetic adaptations (notably the Society of Ether, Virtual Adepts, certain techno-wizards, and some Nephandi), the most efficient and reliable enhancements come from the Technocratic Union. That Union has been refining such advances in a systematic form for over a century, so the more idiosyncratic inventions of rival technomancers can't even come close.

  As a rule, assume that a non-Technocracy character with cybernetic implants suffers from one Genetic Flaw Trait for every dot in the Enhancements Background. These Flaws reflect the unstable nature of cybernetic innovations outside the specialized disciplines of the Technocratic Union's laboratories.

As a final note, it's a *really* good idea for cybernetic characters to cultivate tight friendships with properly skilled technicians. Ascension War cybernauts take one hell of a beating.

Some common cybernetic mods include:

• Online Access

Enlightenment N/A, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 2 pts.

It seems like *everyone's* online these days. A simple wireless sensory array lets the cyborg go online, using sub-vocal voice-activated interface capability. Remote locations limit access to the net, of course, and Umbral trips eliminate it altogether. This level of interface allows the character to use sensory visitation to reach the Digital Web but cannot project her into it on a deeper level. The online access mod includes two USB ports to allow for flash drives, computer connections, or other types of accessorization.

System: Story element; allow the character to go online, receive GPS coordinates, or use the phone as if she had an internal smart phone and a wireless connection.

• Skeletal Enhancement

Enlightenment N/A, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 2 pts.

This essential modification reinforces a cyborg's bones and ligaments. Without it, an organic body can't withstand the stresses of cybernetic hardware and its often-violent applications.

System: Any Enhancement worth three dots or more demands this Enhancement as well. Without it, the character takes a level of aggravated damage every time he uses a cybernetic weapon or protection. This mod also gives the cyborg two extra Bruised health levels and may be purchased as a biomod as well.

•• Bio-Cloaking

Enlightenment 4, Primal Energy 20, Background Cost 6 pts.

Invisible cyborgs? Not quite – the Union's still working on *that* level of technology. Still, the bio-cloaking mod allows a cyborg to bend light and sounds around her body, bestowing a limited form of silence and concealment while the exo moves herself into position or makes a quick escape...

System: Each success rolled from the Enlightenment dice pool adds +1 to the difficulty of all Perception-based efforts to find the cyborg. Alternately, the player could use her successes to reduce the difficulty of her Stealth or hiding rolls. (You can't, however, add to and subtract from a difficulty at the same time – choose one or the other.) This cloaking function costs one Quintessence per turn.

••• Primium Countermeasures

Enlightenment N/A, Primal Energy N/A, Background Cost 4/6/8/10 pts.

To foil the Arts of Reality Deviants, the Technocracy has developed a microweave modification that implants flexible Primium underneath the skin of its valued agents. Even after two decades of experimentation, no other faction has successfully duplicated or countered the Union's formula for Primium, which suggests that Technocracy scientists maintain a constant process of innovation and perfection with that material and its many applications. This, of course, renders it *very* expensive; the Union doesn't waste such resources on just *anyone*, and it expects great things and unswerving loyalty from an agent implanted with such modifications.

System: A Primium-implanted character has several dice of innate countermagick. Four points buy two dice of protection, six points buy three dice, eight points buy four, and 10 points secure five. Even in the 21st century, a character *MUST* be a Technocrat in good standing in order to enjoy the benefits of Primium. If an apparently disloyal cyborg earns an extraction penalty, this mod will be the first thing the technicians remove.

••• Implanted Plasma Cannon

Enlightenment 6/8, Primal Energy 30/40, Background Cost 9/11 pts.

Yes, it's true that Iteration X has been scaling back its more obvious warmongering in recent years. Even so, when some obnoxious RD needs to have his skin seared off, nothing but this beast will do.

Implanted within the cyborg's arm and back, a plasma conversion/ acceleration system extends along her reinforced bones. Upon activation, this system refines Primal Energy into superheated plasma, blazes up around her hand, and delivers the sort of unpleasant surprise that has made Iteration X the first and last name in havoc since roughly 1900.

System: The player makes a Dexterity + Energy Weapons roll to deploy this nasty bit of business. Against a roughly man-sized target, the difficulty to hit is 7. To activate the cannon, the player rolls the device's Enlightenment against a difficulty based upon whether the blast is *coincidental* (difficulty 6), *vulgar* (7), or *vulgar with witnesses* (8). Even in the new millennium, this sort of thing is vulgar as fuck; only in a Technocracy Construct or some regions of the Umbra would such an attack be considered a coincidence.

Each discharge costs one point of Primal Energy. This mod comes in two versions, both of which have been upgraded from their late-'90s applications: a six-dice model and an eight-dice model. Both inflict aggravated damage and have a nasty tendency to bring down Paradox, buildings, and the local constabulary.

Biomods and Genegineering Modifications

Bigger, better, faster, more. The industrial consumer ideal finds its reflection in the endless innovations of biotech. Whereas Iteration X pursues perfection through the interface between humanity and machines, the messier sciences of bioengineering fall under the rubric of the Progenitors and their allies among the Syndicate and NWO. The various mutations, biomods, and constructs favored by these conventions tend to be less obvious than the traditional steelskin exojocks... except when they're *not*, in which case they get locked away in secluded laboratories until their special talents become necessary. The Void Engineers, of course, use both cybernetics *and* biomods, and other factions sometimes play around with bio-adjustments as well. Like cybernetics, however, the Technocracy has a definite edge when it comes to biotechnology.

Story-wise, organic biomods come in several varieties: *genetic engineering*, which facilitates organic mutations; *biomodifications*, which add new organic features to an existing body, and *xenotransplants*, which graft pieces of weird beasties (aliens, werecritters, vampires, and so forth) onto the bodies of humans and other familiar animals. All three require extensive – and often excruciating – laboratory work, although certain hot-ticket biomods can be added or removed with minimal fuss... minimal by biomod standards, anyway. And the majority of them reach beyond the boundaries of Sleeper medicine, although such borders keep shifting further every day.

Rules-wise, biomods follow the same essential rules as cybernetics. They're covered by the Enhancements Background and cost character points to install in an existing character. Unlike cybernetics, however, biomods become organic fixtures in the character – they cannot be yanked out with Life magick, fouled by spells, cut off without surgical removal (although the definition of "surgery" can be rather crude), or shorted out with electricity or other Forces-based attacks.

Paradox and Flaws

Subtle biomods appear perfectly normal. Paradox strikes only if the character displays obviously unnatural qualities (wings, gills, extra limbs, and so forth) or performs activities that defy rational explanation. Given the popularity of media superheroes, though, and the many powers attributed to advanced medicine, "rational explanation" is quite a bit more flexible than it used to be.

- **Biomod Flaws:** Because of the unnatural effect of biomods on an organism's Pattern, a character with obvious biomodifications (wings, claws, gills, scaly skin, and the like) suffers both the normal permanent Paradox points (one per dot) *and* one Genetic Flaw to reflect the effects of those alterations upon the character's physique. A character with invisible biomods (boosted Traits, tough skin, pheromones, etc.) doesn't suffer from Paradox, but he must take one point of Genetic Flaws per dot in the Enhancements background.
- **Genegineering Flaws:** Enlightened Science allows Genegineer Progenitors to create biomodifications at the genetic level. These mods aren't showy, cannot be removed, and do not incur Paradox. Instead, each dot in a genegineered Enhancement requires one point in Genetic Flaws – chronic ailments, behavioral tics, and other symptoms of organic unease.

Although a biomodded character doesn't *have* to take the ***Construct*** Flaw (see p. 647), the social ramifications of that Flaw reflect the often alienated temperament of people who've been altered at the very level of their existence.

Advantages as Biomods

Common biomods can be purchased as the Advantage Traits described above. Other Advantages that aren't in this book – extra limbs, dimensional phasing (that is, the ability to step sideways), and so forth – can be purchased with your Storyteller's approval. These Advantages might also include *xenotransplants*, which go beyond the scope of **Mage 20**. A more extensive treatment of those biomods can be found in **Convention Book: Progenitors**, pps. 70-72.

Unlike cybernetics, biomods do not use Enlightenment or cost Quintessence to employ. Because they're integral parts of the body, they simply work whenever needed. A range of sample biomods includes (but is not limited to) the following options:

Enhanced Pheromones

Background Cost variable

By boosting and enhancing the body's natural social chemistry, Progenitor physicians can help an agent seem more enticing or intimidating. By programming his innate scent, the biomodded operative sends out subtle but potent cues about dominance, availability, or submission... and because he's not casting spells in the magickal sense, his targets won't realize just how deeply they're being played.

System: For every point spent on this biomod, the character gains two additional dice for certain Social-based dice pools, provided that he's got an opportunity to turn on the charm and let his pheromones do the work. Although such chemistry experiments don't confer Talents and Skills he does not already possess, they *do* add to his attempts at Etiquette, Expression, Intimidation, Leadership, Style, Subterfuge, and, of course, Seduction.

Environmental Sustainability Adjustment

Background Cost 3 pts.

Behind that awkward moniker lies a simple yet useful modification: the ability to survive extremes of heat, cold, high (or low) pressure, underwater or deep-space environments, and other hostile climates. Each type of environment, however, requires a different sort of modification: the ability to breathe

underwater won't get you through Death Valley unscathed.

System: Story element: your character can survive an environment that would probably (or certainly) kill a normal human being. As an extra bonus, you double your effective Stamina Trait when soaking damage from the environment you were engineered to survive – fire for heat-adaptation, vacuum for space-adaptation, and so forth. Unlike other biomods, this one can verge into the vulgar spectrum if the agent is doing something she shouldn't be able to endure; holding your breath for an absurd amount of time is one thing, but surviving a blast furnace or a nuclear bomb detonation is another thing entirely!

Facial Reconstruction

Background Cost 2 pts.

Advanced plastic surgery techniques allow Progenitors to craft facial structures and features that can be switched out with an hour or two under the knife. Such facial reconstructions require a small genetic sample from the party being impersonated (assuming that the disguise duplicates a particular individual), and might include profound shifts of bone structure, skin pigmentation, and muscular configuration. Even without the surgery, an agent treated with this biomod can rearrange his features at will – not well enough to assume another person's identity, but with alterations that might allow him to pass for someone other than the person he normally is.

System: After Progenitor surgery, the character's features add +2 to the difficulty of all attempts to see through the disguise. Even without surgery, the agent reduces his own difficulty on rolls to remain unrecognized by -3.

Physical Structure Enhancement

Background Cost varies

Perhaps the most common sort of biomod (or, for that matter, cybernetic enhancement) strengthens the agent's bones, muscles, nerves, ligaments, and other organs. Available at many levels of customization, such alterations raise a human being (or other organism) to heroic heights of physicality. Brave Progenitors and lab-grown Victors display amazing physiques, but they often seem *too* perfect, as if their bodies had been Photoshopped... which really isn't far from the truth.

System: As described in the ***Genegineering*** section of the ***Enhancements*** Background entry, this biomod allows you to raise your character's Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Appearance, Perception, or Health Trait beyond normal human limits. Genegineering and cybernetics can also raise Intelligence, though biomodifications cannot. The cybernetic enhancements can be removed, but for the organic ones, such removal is impossible.

Sensory Enhancers

Background Cost 3-5 pts.

Thanks to altered sensory organs, an agent can enhance her senses to inhuman acuity. The basic biomod simply heightens the existing human senses. With a little extra work, however, the Progenitors can expand upon the human sensory range, opening up the infrared and ultraviolet spectra, high frequencies of sound, and amazing levels of tactile or olfactory perception.

System: At its basic level, this mod gives the character the higher-level ***Acute Senses*** Merit. The expanded version of sensory enhancement, however, allows the player to purchase the ***Nightsight*** Advantage or some equivalent of that ability that applies to taste, smell, hearing, or touch.

Weird Science

Whereas the Technocracy specializes in sleekly standardized hardware, the inventive creations of Etherites, VAs, and other visionary technologists can be quite unique. Although a given inventor might mass-produce a useful widget, most weird scientists tackle their pet theories with swashbuckling élan and stubborn individuality.

••• The DDGR Card (Device/ Gadget)

Arete 5, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 1 pt. (per card)

Crafted by an anonymous (go figure...) Virtual Adept, this wallet-sized hack-attack has found its way into all kinds of eager little hands, Awakened and otherwise. For all the world, the DDGR (Dirt-DiGgeR) card looks like a typical debit card. Inserted into a bank's Automated Teller Machine, however, it scans for the most recent questionable activities on behalf of that bank's executive board. Within seconds, the activated trawler program skims its way past the usual protections and digs up dirt. Because the bank's usual protective networks have been designed to foil theft, the DDGR program remains unrecognized as a threat. When the ATM spits out the user's receipt, the information on it details the names, amounts, and hinky activities associated with that bank within the last week. And because bank executives always seem to be pulling some kind of shit (especially in the World of Darkness), that information comes in very handy... especially for activist bloggers, journalists, and hackers with a few scores to settle with the local elite.

System: A conjunctional Data/ Forces/ Mind Effect digs up the latest dirt. Essentially, this is a story element, although a Storyteller who wants to have the player roll for the card's efficiency can use the card's Arete as a roll versus difficulty 7. Each success turns up one nasty deed and the associated guilty parties. The card remains coincidental unless some Sleeper who's not hip to the DDRG's true purpose happens to see the receipt, at which point the card's Effect incurs three Paradox... and possibly a call to the police. Each DDGR card works only once; after that, the trace program spontaneously erases itself to avoid detection.

••• Kid Kimota's Jovian Thundergloves (Device)

Arete 6, Quintessence 30, Background Cost 9 pts.

In the dwindling days of the last century, when HIT Marks stalked the night and the Pogrom boiled at an intensity not seen since the Second World War, Kid Kimota – an Etherite of blazing wit and perspicacious vocabulary – decided to fight

back. While the citadels of his many allies were falling to the mechanized hordes, Kid Kimota perfected a number of thunderbolt-hurling Devices, configured to deploy a variety of electronic assaults. When the HIT Marks arrived, Kid Kimota and his surviving allies made their Olympian stand. The resulting Paradox storm wiped both sides off the Earth... but several Jovian Thundergloves have since reappeared in the possession of various mages whose nerve outweighs their sense of self-preservation.

Using advanced technologies to draw upon and amplify static electricity (not to mention using quantum gates to draw power from remote Tesla coils), the Jovian Thundergloves concentrate phenomenal power into compact, wearable, and – dare we say it? – elegant accessories. Although each Thunderglove has a slightly different configuration, caused by Kid Kimota's rather rushed production time, each one resembles an insulated gauntlet of metal, leather, and glass. Once primed (a process that demands half a minute to activate the quantum gates), the glove can discharge a bolt of staggering electrical force once every few seconds. The attack is, of course, vulgar in the extreme. When devastating measures are called for, of course, the Jovian Thunderglove makes a magnificently unsubtle choice.

System: The glove's attack combines a Forces 3/ Prime 2 lightning bolt **(six dice, aggravated damage – see *Electrocution* in Chapter Nine, p. 438-439)** with a Correspondence 3/ Forces 2 Effect that pulls the electricity from the Tesla coil (which should be situated some distance away from the Thunderglove's user). Given the titanic voltage involved, electronic systems hit by this discharge are quite likely to go offline... possibly for good. The glove's insulation protects the wearer from electricity *so long as she's not grounded, wet, or otherwise conducting electricity*. If she's foolish enough to use the glove while in a self-conductive state, that character takes the full amount of damage herself. As Kid Kimota will attest if his ghost can be reached for comment, this weapon isn't exactly the ticket to a long and prosperous career.

The massive Tesla coil that powers the Thunderglove must remain accessible to the weapon's user. The glove itself adds three dice of bashing damage to a punch, and it can conduct a single six-die blast of static electricity in a hand-to-hand attack before it discharges its self-contained power. Beyond that, the Jovian Thunderglove is more or less useless on its own. To access its full power (and its Quintessence supply), the wielder needs to own one of Kid Kimota's Tesla coils and generators as well as the glove.

Access to the coil gives your character up to 25 Quintessence per hour, assuming that the generator's running the whole time. Each blast drains one Quintessence and requires two turns between blasts so that the glove's delivery system can build up and channel a new charge to the glove. As noted earlier, this Device is vulgar – both because of the massive electrical charge involved and because of the gateway Effect that allows the lightning to jump from the generator to the glove without passing through the intervening space. On a botch, *VERY* bad things happen. Don't botch with this weapon. Really, *don't*...

••••• Madness Grenade (Fetish/ Talisman)

Arete 7, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 10 pts. (per case of five)

Spectra Widow 6, an agent of the Chaioth Ha-Quadesh division Team 23, devised a horrific party favor: the Balath-Qada Madness Grenade. Once you pull the pin and hurl this gibbering sphere of glassine dementia (filled with insanity spirits) to a suitable location, the sphere explodes, releasing a blast of concentrated chaos. Witnesses have likened that blast to a screaming black-light rainbow-storm, whatever that means... In the aftermath, mechanical systems run haywire, material substances crumble, and living things go stark batshit crazy. Mages caught in the blast can sometimes resist the worst effects of this insanity. Other folks aren't quite so lucky.

System: Each madness grenade contains a spiritual wasp-nest of furious Umbrood, seething with hatred for everything alive. When freed, this compressed ball of chaos unleashes a combined Entropy 5/ Mind 4/ Matter 3 explosion of madness and decay. The spirits merely provide a focus for the Effect itself, which spreads out over a radius of roughly 20 yards (or 18 meters) around the center of the blast.

The Arete of 7 activates an insanity-producing Mind 4 Effect, an order-shattering Entropy 5 Effect, a probability-skewing Entropy 2 Effect, and a substance-cracking Entropy 3/ Matter 3 Effect. Essentially, anyone and anything within the blast radius is fucked unless it has countermagick or can resist the Mind Effect with Willpower. Mages and other Night-Folk stand a decent chance of avoiding the direct impact of the insanity wave (assume that each of the grenade's successes affects one character), but Sleepers might as well enjoy the ride – it's probably gonna last a while.

Thankfully, the grenade's Effects are extremely vulgar in Earth's material reality. The explosion part is perfectly coincidental, but the howling vortex of spirits and the subsequent wave of craziness are not exactly the sort of things you expect when a grenade goes off. In an Umbral environment, however, this is an especially vicious weapon – both coincidental and bound to attract spirits that want to join the fun.

Obviously, each grenade works only once. The detonation entirely consumes the shell, spirits, and waves of insanity. The ripples of probability and mental disruption echo around the blast-zone for the normal Duration (as per the ***Base Damage or Duration chart***); the Matter devastation is permanent, of course, and the insanity might be permanent as well if the grenade's Arete rolls five successes or more. For more details about madness – singular and *en masse* – see ***Sanity Sinks*** in **Chapter Five**, (p. 242), and ***Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*** in **Chapter Nine**, (p. 407).

••••• The Rebooter Self-Retrieval Bio-Printer (Device/ Artifact)

Arete 8, Quintessence 40, Not Available for Purchase

Known snarkily as *The Get Out of Death Free Card*, the ultimate 3D printer allows a mage to reboot herself after an apparent death.

It's not the first resurrection device, of course – such attempts to sidestep mortality are almost as old as magick itself. The Rebooter, though, utilizes technology of an edge so keen it defies tired metaphors. Inspired by the endless survivability of comic-book heroes and villains, the multiple lives of video-game characters, and the self-downloading hypertech innovations for online immersion, a cabal of unknown Masters crafted the Rebooter. Rumors credit Dante, Dr. Volcano, Heasha Morningblade, Raging Eagle, X-Chel, Doc Eon, Kibo, the Rogue Council, and even Archmaster Porthos with the invention, but the truth behind its manufacture remains a deeply occulted secret. Shortly after the Los Angeles Convocation of 2001, however, these machines began appearing in Tradition Chantries across the mortal world. No one knows who installed them, nor has any credible source for them appeared as of yet. The exact number of them remains unknown, but the most accurate count puts the existing Rebooter units at 10 – one for each Tradition within the Council, plus one left as an enduring mystery.

Essentially a gigantic printer filled with cartridges of raw, Quintessence-rich biomass, the Rebooter employs computer-stored data to recreate the dead mage from backup files made when that mage was alive. Obviously, the rebooted person must allow her innermost self to be downloaded into the Rebooter's memory before she dies. The printer spins out the reconstituted self and "bakes" it in a complex process of arcane technologies that takes three days. (Clearly, the creators of this Artifact had a poetic sense of humor… or something…) Once rebooted, the mage emerges from a large bath-cylinder where the respawned body has been formed. That new self exists in the state that mage occupied when she was downloaded into the data banks, without subsequent memories, skills, or attachments. For that reason, among others, mages who are aware of the Rebooter's existence like to update their personal files as often as possible. Of course, the possibility that those files might be *hacked* hangs over anyone who has allowed herself to be downloaded into the printer's database. Those precious Rebooters are heavily secured, of course… but, as any hacker knows, any data that *can* be accessed *will* be accessed…

System: A monumental Life 5/ Mind 5/ Prime 5/ Spirit 5/ Time 4 Effect recreates the character from her save point, reconstituting her body, memories, soul, personal essence, and sense of self at the moment when she downloaded them into the Rebooter (hence, the Time 4 component). This feat goes far beyond the Technocracy's clone-chambers because the self created by the Rebooter includes a bit of the real mage's soul – a feature the Union cannot bring itself to accept. Hence, this Artifact can be used only by Awakened mages whose beliefs include both mysticism *and* hypertech. The Rebooter is an abomination to sheer faith (for which the machine usurps the power of divinity) and science (for which its functions remain impossible). Only magick that's composed of all things can explain the miracles this machine performs.

That doesn't mean that the Rebooter is perfect. A reboot uses the machine's entire store of Quintessence points – 30 for the mage, 10 for the process – which means that it must be refueled with massive amounts of energy whenever anyone uses it. Each time a mage respawns, she earns one point of permanent Paradox. Some of her memories and emotions glitch after each reconstitution, thanks to miniscule imperfections in the data. That mage returns to her save point without the Traits she had upgraded since that point; her Arete, Spheres, Abilities, and so on are as she left them when she downloaded that bit of herself into the machine. Oddly enough, however, certain distinct differences appear in her respawned self – quirks of personality and appearance that were not there when she existed in her previous incarnation. Those differences might be puzzling to the mage herself, who has no explanation for where they might have come from. And folks who knew her well might notice those differences and begin to wonder what happened to the friend they once knew…

Above all, the new incarnation bears a hint of existential dread. After all, if she exists now, that means that she once died… and that she lived some part of her life that is now lost forever. Add to that the various philosophical conundrums about identity, self, and the place of magick, faith, and science in a world where machines can reconstruct your soul, and you've got a mage who's thankful to be alive but uncertain about what that life might mean.

There's always a chance, of course, that the mage won't have to worry about that. A failed roll means that the respawning attempt failed and must be attempted again… with a +1 difficulty modifier added, thanks to glitches in the software, hardware, and materials. A botch fouls the process forever, erasing the mage's saved identity and preventing any form of reconstitution from that point onward. The machine is vulgar, of course, anywhere outside a Sanctum or Horizon Realm whose internal reality accepts fusions of magick, faith, and science. And the reappearance of a person who was considered dead could raise some uncomfortable questions – especially if that person is younger than the person her associates recall, lacking memories of the time between her save point and apparent demise, and *most* especially if her demise was spectacular enough that "*no one could have survived THAT*."

Still, life is life, and new starts can be wonderful things. The Rebooter might invite tangled questions about past and present, but it offers a future where none had seemed possible before. A mage restored to life experiences a fresh sense of purpose, tempered with mortality and the understanding that nothing is forever. If nothing else, then, the Rebooter's existence just goes to show that you can't keep a good mage down.

Afterwords

Writing is a curious endeavor, swerving from moments of splendid delirium into others of stunned puzzlement, and from there into stretches of calm, focused craft.

— David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*

We published the first edition of **Mage: The Ascension** in 1993, but the game was effectively born in 1991, ahead of the release of the first game set in our World of Darkness, **Vampire: The Masquerade**. That's when my partner Mark Rein • Hagen and I decided that **Vampire** would be the first of a five-book sequence of games. **Werewolf** would be second in 1992, and **Mage** third in 1993 [1].

To begin the process of tying the games together, we included the Tremere as a clan in **Vampire**. The Tremere are magi from the Order of the Hermes who originate in *Ars Magica*, a game that White Wolf owned at that time, and so we knew that somehow the remainder of the Order of Hermes would be included in **Mage**.

And so, effectively, **Mage** was born.

Not everything with the World of Darkness went according to our 1991 plans. We didn't know yet that every WoD game would have a colon in the title. *Ghost* turned into **Wraith: The Oblivion**, and *Faerie* became **Changeling: The Dreaming**. There was one thing that remained unwavering: My desire to be the development lead on **Mage**. It was the World of Darkness concept that sang to me.

Initially, I was primarily determined to revolutionize magic in roleplaying games. I was determined that the magic system would represent more than just a codification of powers for characters. No matter how elaborate or elegant the magic systems in prior games, they all seemed to be extensions of the game *systems*, and not of the game *worlds*. At White Wolf, setting was a predilection that guided many of our design decisions. So I felt the magic system needed to arise from the setting, and that meant creating a comprehensive metaphysic that served both as a philosophical basis for the setting and a mechanical basis for the magick system. Yes, now with a "k".

In 1992, once **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** was through the development process, I turned my attention to **Mage**. After dealing with the Kindreds' Gehenna and the Garou's Apocalypse for the past two years, I made an essential decision for **Mage**: The game would be essentially uplifting. Where Golconda was a state few vampires desired, Ascension would be the aspiration of every mage.

For a year I buried myself in **Mage** [2]. I spent 16 hours a day absorbing texts of all sorts, and then waited as all the concepts bubbled *double, double, toil and trouble*-style. I pitched the initial results of this process to my White Wolf cohorts, and then proceeded to recruit co-creators. Christopher Earley and my brother Steve Wieck were the most important of these, and both wrote substantial sections in the first edition of the game.

The lynchpin in the creation process was the development of the idea of coincidental magick. This single concept bridged the divide between the game as theory and the game in execution, the metaphysics of reality and the mechanics of the game-system in play. The concept tied magick not just to the setting, but also made the ongoing use of the magick system an integral part of the cooperative storytelling process that was central to White Wolf's roleplaying conceits.

When I spearheaded **Mage: The Ascension** 20 years ago, I assumed that I would go on to author or design a number of

additional works. As assumption transforms into hindsight, I see that **Mage** still stands as my magnum opus. I'm not distressed by that thought for two reasons. The less-important of them is the conviction that I have other great works forthcoming. More important is the heartfelt understanding that **Mage** completely gratifies me and my fellow creators, and I could not ask for any greater accomplishment with an artistic work than to touch in a profound way such a large number of people.

The reality of changing people's lives is surely the ultimate achievement of a game about changing reality.

Stewart Wieck

Houston, TX

1. The fact that many to most of you are reading this on a screen – very likely a portable screen – is, from a 1993 perspective, the domain of the Virtual Adepts. At that time, we didn't even have a website.

2. Almost literally, at least as we joked. Richard Thomas and I, at one point, contemplated a plan to circulate a rumor that I had died during the writing and that my ashes were mixed with the paper pulp used to print the book.

• • •

The dude on the bus looked like a future Me – not the Me I am today, roughly 22 years later, happy and healthy and just a tad overweight, but a Me I could have been had I continued on the path I was trudging along back in 1993. That dude looked miserable, haggard, utterly without hope. And yeah, 22 years ago, that's exactly how I felt. The details aren't important. Let's just say I was one sad motherfucker. And seeing that dude sitting across from me on the bus, I thought *Oh my gods, I don't ever want to look like that.*

Now, by that time I had already ensconced myself with this brawling little startup called White Wolf Game Studio. Thanks to my college friend and gaming-buddy Bill Bridges, I'd been hammering away on a handful of **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** sourcebooks in addition to another handful of short stories and magazine articles in other venues. Those gigs, however, were most assuredly not paying the bills. And so I was grinding away at an ironic day-job, selling shoes (which I loathe) at "Virginia's Largest Shoe Store." Anyone who's read "Food for Wyrms" in **Freak Legion: A Players Guide to Fomori** knows how I felt about that job... and about my life in general. (Thank all the gods I did not have kids.)

I needed to Get. *Out.*

On the "advice" of Joseph Campbell (courtesy of my old friends John and Laurie Robey), I took a few weeks off and went to go visit my college friend Jennifer Starling out in San Francisco. There, I underwent a "bust down the doors" ritual so that I could get through the blocks that were ruining my life.

A few days after my return, I told Bill that I wanted to apply for the **Mage** Line Developer position. "You don't want this job," Bill told me. "It's harder than you can possibly believe."

"My life is hell," I told him. "*Anything* is an improvement."

And y'know what? I got it. And it *was*.

Three days before Gen Con 93, Stewart Wieck called me at work to offer me the job. Within 24 hours, I was on a plane to Atlanta, and shortly afterward, Ken Cliffe handed me the first copy of **Mage: The Ascension** to come back from the press. "It's all yours," he told me. "We don't have the slightest idea what to do with it."

I spent the next five years figuring out where to take that line.

Mage became my life, my labor, my lover, my quest. With a wildly creative crew, we made magick, mistakes, and miracles. Kathleen Ryan, Brian Campbell, Mark Jackson, Sam Chupp, Beth Fischi, Rachelle Udell, Rich Thomas, Heather McKinney (now known as Echo Chernik), J. Porter Wiseman, Jackie Cassada and Nicky Rea, Deena McKinney, Allen Varney, Bill Bridges, Jim Estes, James A. Moore... We brainstormed at all hours, beat our heads and hearts against metaphysical conceits. And somehow, we turned one of the most crazily ambitious RPGs ever created into an award-winning epic about "reality on the brink." We did some great stuff, some awful stuff, and a lot of stuff in between. By the time I handed **Mage** off to Jesse Heinig in late 1998, that purple-jacketed enigma had racked up over 50 volumes and changed a lot of lives... my own life most of all.

In the many years since I encountered **Mage**, I've talked to lots of people whose lives have been transformed by the things we crafted and the ideas we put out there on the gaming table. It means more to me than I can say (and as this book shows, I can say quite a bit!) to learn how influential our work has been. And so – to all of you – *THANK YOU*. Thanks to all of our collaborators, all of our fans, all the many, *many* friends I have made in these last 22 years. Thank you, Stewart, and thank you, Bill.

And thank you also, whoever you are, Sad Old Dude On The Bus. I'm not sure whether you actually existed or whether you were some sort of self-projection – some Phil-Of-Futures-Yet-To-Come sent to me in order to get me to change the path I was on back then. Whoever you might have been, I hope you got your happy ending. I certainly got mine, and as the days roll by, I appreciate it even more.

To all of you reading these words right now, I wish you magick, hope, and love.

Never let your world destroy the miracle you can be.

Satyros Phil Brucato

Seattle, WA

I remember being knocked down and laughed at as I walked to the mall to buy **Mage: The Ascension** 20 years ago. I can still hear the other teenagers laugh at the nerd who was awkwardly ambling towards the book store. I remember climbing back into the car after my purchase. My father asking me why I was crying. I never told him.

That night, I buried myself between the purple covers of this great game. I wanted to get away from reality. I wanted to be someone else. **Mage** wouldn't let me. It taught me about paradigms, reality, and what it truly meant to be Awakened. All the power of the universe lay in my own perceptions. It taught me to forge my own reality. Not with Spheres, not with rotes (as badass as those things are), but with thoughts. From those thoughts came *actions*. And those actions created the reality I experience today, and all the gifts in it. My wife, my home, my sense of who I am, all started on that day in 1994 when a geeky high school freshman Awakened.

James Michael Spahn (Greensboro, North Carolina)

We tell stories about ourselves. That's the "paradigm" we weave to make sense of coincidences, accidents, and just or unjust acts. We lash them to ideas about how we think the world works. **Mage** is our storytelling life on a cosmic scale, with pulp, occult, and SF embellishments to intrigue and tempt us into grandiose dreams: kickass adventures and the trap of hubris.

To me, **Ascension**'s message is that no myth, paradigm, prop, focus or trope can replace compassion: listening to stories outside of our experience, acting on them for love or justice, and drawing the threads into a rope stronger than any single belief.

Malcolm Sheppard (Toronto, Ontario)

Mage: The Ascension line author (Revised Edition)

Mage is a gem in the sea of broken glass we commonly call "entertainment." Before I had happened upon an old copy of **Mage** in a used-book store – work that showed us love, hate, and finding the meanings of power and godhood – it seemed as though such things were all left to the past, to be partitioned out by state institutions and argued over by academics. **Mage** showed me a unique world of freedom (and limitations) that was interactive and commutative beyond traditional understandings of such. It showed me that games could be art.

Dustin McPherson (San Diego, CA)

Once upon a time, someone introduced me to the Mighty Purple Books. It was a dark period at my life, and I lacked hope. Reading *Mage*, playing it, I found my best friends and I changed my perspective. In a world where *YOU* can shape reality with your own hands, I found hope. **Mage** is about *willing* a better world for yourself, about changing reality and fighting for what you truly believe. I can't see a better fable for the days in which we are living. *BELIEVE!* And for everything else... don't forget your fireball.

Êmili Lemanski (Santa Maria, Brazil)

Mage gave me the ability to put my true inner self into a character I loved to play. Over the years, more and more of that inner self that was originally expressed in my character Tachete has become the evolving being that has become my public self as well.

Hope Basoco (Phoenix, AZ)

Dante was/ is me. He is a young Black technophile with a smartass mouth, and just enough power to get himself in/ out of trouble. So if you can "bend" reality, do some good. Do good even if that means shaking off some Paradox. That means you're doing it right. If you are playing **Mage**, and the stakes aren't epic in nature, then you are doing it wrong. We created **Mage** for elite storytellers. If reality really *is* a "work in progress," then you got some work to do. Oh, and if anyone tells you "That ain't possible!" then congratulations. Dante approves.

Travis L. "Dante" Williams (San Mateo, CA)

Mage: The Ascension Author (1st Edition)

My journey with **Mage: The Ascension** began during my junior year as a religion major in college, when I discovered that the sourcebook was just as worthy of study as my theology textbooks. Not once have I merely "played" a **Mage** campaign – it's more that the product line became reference material as I continued my education in both life and academia. It was that good, that complex and insightful. Fiction can explore in equal measure the fantastical and the possible, and like the best of the real-life mystics and sages its resounding message was this: *Follow your own Path, and life fiercely*.

Sean-Michael Argo

Filmmaker, Ember Days

No kidding, this book taught me something I'll take to all my life: *Hope*. With heroes and anti-heroes, humans like ourselves who live their lives to change the world like they do, how can we *not* allow ourselves be "contaminated" by this belief as well? Okay, it's just a game... but once you enter the world of **Mage**, you will understand: The Will can change the world – the World of Darkness, and our own world too. For all this, I'm eternally grateful to **Mage**.

Eva Morrissey (Guarulhos, Brazil)

The first time I grabbed **Mage: The Ascension**, I felt suspicious. I had long since given up on playing mage characters in roleplaying games, as I have never liked the closed lists of magical effects or powers, each to be triggered within each level of each school you have learned. However, I took a look at it... and then I could not stop until the end. **Mage** is not only an open-ended guide, but also a challenge to your imagination. It is as simple as This: *If you have the knowledge and you have the means, then you can do it*. So weave your own spells. The glory has always been there for you to get it. It's yours. It's *you*.

Antoni Giménez (Barcelona, Spain)

Twenty years ago, I'm hanging around with friends and one says, "*Hey! I just got this new RPG. Let's try it out.*" And everything changed forever. I created a Goth Verbena named Tantras. Silly, really, but when you're an angsty teen playing in the World of Darkness, this is what you come up with.

Our first firefight, I have no combat skills, but I have Life 3: "*Hey Eric? Life 3 says I can create simple invertebrates. Can I create a clam in that guy's heart?*" "*Sure, why not? Roll for it.*"

As a result of that afternoon, I have become a longtime player of World of Darkness, and more specifically of **Mage: The Ascension**. Who out there has never dreamed of a world that was different than the one we have? Belief is a powerful thing, and in dreaming we create a new world. So, thanks, folks, for giving us an unbelievable sandbox to create our worlds in.

Valentine Graves (Seattle, WA)

Mage, for me, has always been one of the greatest and most intriguing games: a game about discovery, about philosophy, about thinking differently. It was original, it was unique, and it wasn't about killing the antagonist. However, it was also one of the hardest paradigms to master I have ever encountered in my career as a Storyteller at conventions. It's often a misunderstood game, and I hope that **M20** will incite the adults that we became to rethink the worlds – both the World of Darkness and also our own world. Reading and mastering the amazing paradigm of **Mage** has made me think over my existence in other terms – to go beyond my perspective and see a larger Reality.

Emmanuelle Usselmann Nadin (World Citizen)

I've always loved stories. Much of my childhood was spent absorbing comic books, movies, and television. My older brother initiated me in the art of the dungeon-crawl before I could shave. In high school, I encountered a purple book full of rules and ideas for telling stories of modern Magick and wonder. I spent the next several years surrounded by dice, empty coffee cups, and an ever-growing stack of purple books. My love of stories grew into a love of storytelling. **Mage** taught me to dream the impossible. **Mage** taught me to write. **Mage** taught me to believe.

Travis Legge (Rockford, IL)

www.aegisstudios.com

Mage came at a time when I was still forming my worldview and metaphysics... and I cannot discount the impact it had on me. It was a confirmation that we have unlimited potential to create our own reality, as filtered by our perceptions. To this day, I see **Mage**'s philosophy confirmed in myself and in the people around me. Tending your paradigm can be intentional. Belief spawns reality. Because of **Mage**, I am so much more keenly sensitive of how my thoughts affect my life. Through roleplay, I've become able to practice intention within the real world.

Miguel Eduardo Ludert (Richmond, VA)

A game where you are a mage, in modern times, and with no spell-lists: That's how **Mage** was introduced to me when I began playing RPG's. Being the mage-y type myself, I was instantly attracted to it. I read it, I discussed it and, of course, I played and told stories with it. My first **Mage** character is someone I can't forget. My best and most intense LARP moment occurred while playing a mage, and some of my most memorable gaming sessions – whether serious or just plain wacky – have all been related to **Mage**. And, of course, these experiences changed me and shaped me. Because, to me, it's not about the Ascension anymore. It's about the Memories.

Julio Romacho (Madrid, Spain)

Not only is **Mage** an awesome game for exploring a rich imaginative mythology and epic storytelling. If you hold your mind right, it also lends an unparalleled framework for pondering the reality Behind the fiction... and perhaps, if you're lucky, for finding a deeper connection to the very real magick that moves in our own world.

Arjil (Central AR)

In the 20-years plus of enchanting myself and others with roleplaying games, one encounter – an "Awakening," if you will – took hold of my imagination, because **Mage: The Ascension** tackles the fragile balance between the fabric of reality and Magick. It engages all participants by bringing the shared experience of our imagination through storytelling, weaving our minds into a fabric – an embrace. Allowing us to seek that opening in the soul, where once we used to dwell when we were children and still believed in Magick. A gateway to visiting the world beyond our own and seeking the new wonders we may find there.

Isabelle Hénault (Montreal, Quebec)

Mage has given me words for things I didn't know there was a language for, ideas I had in my head but didn't know anyone else could understand. We live in a world where growth is good but change is threatening. How do we balance this? Whether this is a society thing or a mechanical human function I don't know – only that it's part of the currently running program. Who knows which lines of code are old and which are new? It's a puzzle I'm still sorting out. Knowing that the cataclysm is coming, I feel a need to formalize my cabal – to bring the things I have learned from **Mage** into the daily practice of our own magic... Reading the first page of the Intro [to **Mage 20**], the best I can say to myself is: *Stop whining, chica. Time-out's over. Time to get back in the war.*

Coyote Ashley Ward (Woodbridge, VA)

I have so many amazing memories of **Mage**, from both tabletop and live-action games. Those stories opened a world of myth and dreams, the fine line between static reality and the unexplained universe. It gave me a place and a time to push mental and emotional boundaries, and play out the great "*what-ifs*" that enchant and plague us. **Mage** gifted me with new eyes to really see all the beauty and possibility in our amazing world. I continue to share that dream with my children: the great gift of stories, myth, and unlimited possibility.

Jenn Isyllt (Dallas, TX)

I would not be the man I am without **Mage**.

I discovered the game my first year in college. Though I was always a creative person in my youth, and was aware of various religions, the concept of Reality as a fluid construct fueled entirely by willpower did nothing short of crack open my intellectual and spiritual foundations. The game itself – with its story of personal enlightenment, the struggle to use that power to forge a new Creation – did more than simply present to me an alternative concept of Reality. It also drove me to create, and to think in ways that I would never have done before. **Mage** remade my concept of the world. For that, I will be forever grateful.

Michael Shean (Springfield, VA)

Magick is about how we become ourselves. Every path we choose leads us to the most exciting travel *into* us... but *outside* us, and that's a paradox! Ha-ha! We all are connected in many levels: our lives, our thoughts, our histories. And **Mage** brings us the convergence and joy of the extraordinary. I'm happy to be part of this world, happy to have made great friends playing this game. Let the Quintessence flow through our souls, and live! Good vibes and good luck for everyone!

Thaynah "Young Phoenix" Leal (Pernambuco, Brazil)

Ironic as it may sound, **Mage** is not about magick. **Mage** is about the Self and how we handle it.

The questions that guide the Awakened along the Path to Ascension are the same fundamental questions that most "sleepers" ignore and some "awakened" dare to answer: *Who am I, why I am, and what am I supposed to do with that "I"?*

Being yourself is a tough but rewarding task, and though it sounds easy, it is not. Everyday factors make us twist and turn ourselves upside down and inside-out, making us unwitting conformists of a larger, false-collective behavior. **Mage**, however, is about having the will to be your True Self regardless of circumstance, and about handling the power and responsibility that comes with it.

In a few words, **Mage** is not about magick. Mage is about *people*... about *us*.

Antonios Rave-n Galatis (Piraeus, Greece)

Mage is freedom. **Mage** is the ability to be who you want to be for a day. It is the chance to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. It is the chance to be a hero or a leader. It is also the opportunity to become a challenge, to safely vent, and to see the world in a new light. In this world that makes you feel so small, so ordinary, **Mage** makes you feel important, needed, powerful, smart, strong and skilled. Who am I? I am a car-wash attendant; a nerd who was – until I joined the LARP community – very much alone. When I play **Mage**, I am Eris, Hierarch of the City of New Callicum, a leader of the mage community – a protector, a dark knight. Playing **Mage** was the best decision I have ever made, and the community has been the most loving and accepting group of people I have ever met. **Mage** is freedom. Your only limit is your imagination.

Amy J. Redfern (Bellingham, Washington)

I use to think that **Mage**'s books provided the ground to cease my agonies. But this is actually not true. After **Mage**, I am still confused, amazed, and scared. But I can point forth and say I have Awakened. **Mage: The Ascension** is indeed a game – a life-changing game. It changed the way I relate to people, ideas, and life itself. Like an endless stream of energy, it taught me that there is always more inside our souls, things which we can touch and share for a higher life experience.

Thanks for making many years of our lives happier. I love you all.

Rafael "Kaichkull" Mastromauro (Campinas, Sao Paulo, Brazil)

May you raise your eyes and never bow your head
We are not alone
S.I. Tucker, "Come to the Labyrinth"

Awakened Roll Call

Army of the Night

@schiko
Adam W. R. Martins
Adan Smith
Aleksandra Petreska
Alexander Marshall
Alice C.
Ana Claudia Silva
Andrea Gausman
Andrew Kissinger
Andrew McGrath
Anna Elizabeth Hickok
Archimedean Point Cabal - Cheshire, bani Virtual Adepts
Archimedean Point Cabal - Elen Wu, bani Verbena
Archimedean Point Cabal - Ethan Maynard, bani Hermes
Archimedean Point Cabal - Hope Lambert, bani Verbena
Archimedean Point Cabal - Lucas Diaz, bani Akashic
Archimedean Point Cabal - Melissa Gardner, bani Hermes
Archimedean Point Cabal - Rudy Ulrick, bani Dreamspeakers
Archimedean Point Cabal - Samuel Damascus, bani Hermes
Archimedean Point Cabal - Sara Lee, bani Ether
Archimedean Point Cabal - Starshine, bani Ecstasy
Ashley Skallicky
Avram R. Shannon
Bell-X
Bookplate Ana
Brandon Dee Rogers
Brandon Lane
Brandon Paul
Brian Horstmann
Bryan Allen Hickok
Camila Montenegro bani Flambeau
Carl Matheson, Son of Ether
Carol Darnell
Charles Knight, Royal Ethernautical Society
Chastity Pilgrim
Chazz Kellner
Chriss
Christian Magnaghi
Christofer Sandell
CJ Romer
Daniel Belmont
Dann Kriss Games
Darin Kerr
David "Hollow One" Martinez
Diego Segura Luengo
Doc Eon
Doctor Esoteric
Dr Gertrude Primordium
Dr. Anthony Maynard
Dr. Joel McCall
Dr.NAKAGAWA Kozi
Edward Murphy
Eric Minton
Esper, the Quintessential Dimensional Crafter
Ezekial Jones
Frater Hormaku
Gareth Hodges
Glauco Vieira
Grzegorz Kohorewicz
Guardián de las Sombras, Doctor Steranko, Hijo del Éter.
Guardian de las Sombras, Zacarias Fernandez, Coro Celestial
Guardián de las Sombras, Alex Sánchez, Culto del Éxtasis
Guardián de las Sombras, Tomas Díaz, Orden de Hermes
Gwen Black
Helen Febrie
Horace Ashcroft
Inky Grrl
James Mendez Hodes
Janya Levin
Jarrell Fletcher
Jay Collins
Jefferson Silva de Almeida
Jeremiah Quinn
Jessica Dent
Jessica Purdy
Jim Schofield
Joe Zavcer
Joel "Lostkith" Cotton
John
John "King" Roberts
John Bridges
Johnny Applegoth
Johnny Crow
Jorge's Puppy
Joseph Fong
Joshua Curcuro
JP Sugarbroad
Julie Guérot
Karina Gillis-Bugg
Kimberley "Phoenix" Laycraft
Ko Fong
Kristastic
Lillaine Morus
Lillian Cohen-Moore
Lincoln Cheah Zhuo Hua
Lord Absinthe (Graham Alstan)
Lord Cochise
Lou Silvers
Lucius Vayne
Magister Mundi Lancelyn Verdery bani Bonisagus bani Order of Hermes, pars Quaesitor
Magus Rex
Maih Barahona
Marcus Terrance, Order of Hermes House Esoterica-Thig, Son of Uktena and Marianna of Balador
Mark Huba
Matt M McElroy
Matthew Broome
Matthew J. Locke
Michael "Whalelover" Strumm
Michael Tree
Michelle Bradbeer
Miranda Silva
Mog
Moreno Bianconcini
Nina Elisaberh Blain
Ol' Nev
Ophelia de Guerre
Parallax.bat
Parhelia Games
Please do not list my name
Rafael Verolla, the NWO agent
Raffaele Passarelli
Random
Regina "Aqua Regia" Lisak
Richard Downs
Richard Hertz
R'kaiyu
Robert Daines
Ronald Corn
Sam Gunn
Samantha Davis, Akashic Brotherhood, Ferryman and Dragon Emissary
Samuel "Ness" Davis
Samuel Brana-Soto
Sandra Mitze Powell (Mirrorshades)
Secret Agent John Courage
Silas (Riley) Mason
Simon Black
Simon Linder
Stephen Ball
Stylianos Bakas
Tadashi Wu
Tauanui Stone
Team Ether Toronto Chantry
The Keeper of Crystalline Memory
The Nikolaidis Family
Thomas A. Schneider

Travis McFee - Cult of Ecstasy, Time-travelling hippie Arch-Mage of Time, Wanderer of the years 1952-2054, Owner and Operator of the Magic Bus, Guardian of the Lava Lamp Time Beacon through the Highways of All-Time
Tresi Arvizo
Vasilis Dalitsikas
Vivian Black, Head of The Order Of The Dawning Truth
William May
Xavier Stanton
Zachariah Hicks
Zachary Hensley

Ember K. Miller
His High Potentate
Martin A. Milne
Johan Eklund
Jonathan Garcia-Carabajal
Kelley Barnes
Kristen "Kitty Wood
Tasnica
Yseulte Cass

Acolyte

Adam Morgan
Aislyn Dawkins, VA.RH
C C Magnus Gustavsson
Davide Pongiluppi
Duncan Brennan
Fahrenheit Desaier
James Ebert
Michael Lawson
Will Rawson

Mark Sauren (Xen0tech/X3n0XM/pithatharouse)

Aaron Alberg
Aaron Westphal
Abie Ekenezar
Adalhart "Window Jumper" Travers
Adam "Magus" Loyd
Aelinea
Ajoxer
Alan-Michael Havens
Alessandro Masi
Alessandro Vario
Alex T Dillon
Alexander Lucard
Alexander Williams
Alexander Y. Hawson
Alexis Hastings
Álvaro "Galael" Molina
Alwin Penterman
Amanda "Laughing Hyena" Johnson
Amelia Gearheart
Amy Luke
Amy Veeres
Ana Mizuki
Andreas Melhorn
Andrew "Dropbear" Noble
Andrew Hauptman
Andrew Howell
Andy Harsent
Angelo Pileggi
Ansel Alexander Hamilton Davies VI
Antoine DuBois, 3rd Initiate of the Ninth Circle
Antti Knutas
Aran Carmon
Arthur Nascimento
Ash Walter
Asia Davidson
Atticus Winterton-Perks
Beckett
Ben Bonds
Ben Stewart
Benton Little
Bernie Frick
Bert Isla
Bob Hafer
Bobby Chow
Booghost Chantry
Bovolon
Brad Gunnels
Braden Kanipes
Brett Alexander
Brett Bowen
Brian King
Brian Rock
Britian Oates
Bruce Gray
Bruce N. Stein
Bruce Ralston
Bruno Zilli
Bryan
bwgustaf
Cam Lewis
Caoimhghin
Cara Milne
Caran Carch
Carl L. Congdon
Carlton W. Anderson
Carly Ho
Carrie Hitt
Castille Condracus
Cesarius
Chance Weiss
Chapel
Chris Challice
Chris Helsabeck
Chris Lackey
Chris Michael Jahn
Chris Stehlik
Christopher Hill
Christopher Lee
Christopher Saldaña
Christopher Wiegand
Clan DAM
Clarence Washington III
Clayton R Huettemann
Cody Black
Colin Anders Brodd
Craig "Doc Ryder" Brown
Craig Oxbrow
Cris Hundley
CS Williams
D.J. Dittman
Dan Cameron
Daniel Cazan
Daniel Flood
Daniel Laloggia
Daniel Rabinovich
Danilo Alexandre Soares Takano
Dante Sunchaser
Dario Monaco
Darkshifter
Darryl Johnson
Dave Chalker
Dave Mendiola
David "Weimann" Karlson-Weimann
David A. Cuneo
David Annandale
David Chart
David Fuller
David Gordon Buresh
David John Williams Jr.
David Komonee
David Millians
Davin Wärter
Dennis Czeluscinski
Diego Rivera
DiomedesRex
Dionysia Jones
Dolran
Doug Hagler
Douglas Jacobson
Drunar
Duane Tomlinson
Dustin Westfall
Edoardo Franco
Elissa "The Miss E" Ayadi
Elizabeth Davis
Emilius Cobalt
English Bob
Eric "Lameth" Folco
Eric C. Magnuson
Eric Massicotte
Eric Poh
Eric The Pipe
Eric Thompson
Erico
Erik Thurman
Eriol Diethel, Voice of the Celestial Chorus, Lyserg's twin soul.
Erwin Burema
Eu
François TRAUTMANN
Frederic SO
Frothers
Gaby Lax
Gaius of Xor
gajoos
Garret Hilfer
garvin anders
Gary Robinson Hermes bani Ex Miscellanea
Geoff Squire
Gerardo Zamora
Gideon Wolfe
Gintaras Jasiulionis
Graeme Rigg
Graham Starfelt
Greg Harris
Gregory Eburn
Gregory Siron
Guilherme Spindola
HANATAKA Shinya
Harley Silver Wolf
Hex Cross
Hieu "Tony" Nguyen aka Xyrus Oblisk
HPLustcraft
Igor Toscano
Imran Inayat
Inserirenomequi
Ixis Wieland
J.B. ten Berg
Jaakko Saari
Jack "The Dragon"
Jack Vivace
Jackson Brantley
Jacob A Helton
Jacob Bruhn Paasch
Jael Harmon
Jake Mandel
Jame Scholl
James Ford
James Pasque
James Post
James Valadas Marques
Jamie Dupree
Jan Kilpinen
Janus ex Merinita
Jarvis Stone
Jason Brandt
Jason Hockley
jaymi elford
Jeb Woodard
Jeff Tabrum
Jen "Loopy" Smith
Jessica Hammer
Jesus O Luzon
João Mariano
Joe Robbins
Joel "GLENNGAR" Leyton

Joey Martin
Johan Norton
John "Myth" Kennedy
John Anthony Fox
John Bogart
John Canter
John Morel
Johnathan Byerly
Jonathan Ruffin
Jordan Springer
Joseph "Mage Hunter" Coyle
Joseph Eich
Joshua and Kevin-Lynn Kubli
Joshua Gorfain
Joshua W. Pittman
Juan Sangrós Alcalde
Justin Shullick
Justin Woo
Kahoali the Mad
Karl Norberg III
katie-kat
Kendall Uyeji
Kevin C. Carpenter
Kevin Drugan
Kevin 'Supreme' Sharpe
Kimberely Altomere
Kissara Leigh
Knut Borchert
Kristian A. Bjørkelo
Kristine Roper
Kurt Hanna and Maire Bourke
Kyle Monroe
Kyndyl Greyland
KZ
Larry Stanton
Lauren Anne Perpetua Marino
Laurie J Rich
Lee Chan-Woo
Leo "Seeker" Caldas
Leonardo Thymon Fachin
Lewis Cassidey
Linda "Eel" Lee
Liz Ruifrok
LordofArcana
Lorenzo Bracchi
Łukasz Korzeń
Łukasz Rączkowski
Lyserg Diethel, Sword of the Celestial Chorus, Eriol's twin soul.
M Gabriel Colbaugh
MacIntoush
Maetell
Majestic-MJ
Marcelo Sepulveda
Marcus Brissman
Marina Patelos
Mark Alello
Marsha "Mags the Axe" White
Martianus Nil
Martin Denton
Martin Silver
Maskaradry & LeoDoray
Matheus Pitta
Matt and Janet Houck
Matt Betts of Black Hole
Trebuchet
Matt Dempsey
Matt Rice
Matt Wontroba
Matthew Campbell
Matthew Earlywine
Matthew McDonnell
Matthew Turner
Max
Maxime Berar
Maxwell Heath
Mechalith
Merle Blue
Metal Fatigue
Michael Godwin
Michael Kusnetsov
Michael 'Minder' Riabov
Michael Nelson Wagner
Michael Nutt
Michael Parker
Michael R. Underwood
Michele Glasnovic Zapf
Mikael Barbo
Mike Craft
Mike Horton
Mike Spector
Mike W. Leavitt
Miriam
Mo
Morgan "Kyp Manning" Wessler
MPIII
Mustafa Nuri Kemal
Myke and Alicia
Nancy Feldman
NeoParn
Nicholas Peterson
Niferbelle
Nigel Wright
Nikki Winters
Nimbral Montes Rosa
Noah Crow
Noelle "SnowJackal" Turner
Nuno Vargas
Olatunji Nuga
Omar Amador
OrangeNewton
Orpho Wynne
Oskar "Samadhir" Avén
P. J. Hightower
Patrick Sullivan
Patrick Welsh
Paul Wyatt
Pawel "Matoos" Matusiak
Peter Klevvall
Peter McGyrk
Peter Steponaitis
Peter Trueman
Phil "The Barbarian" Martin
Phil Hattie
Philipp Hattemer
Philippe Daigneault
Phillip Bailey
Picks-at-Flies
Pierre "Vahn Kergonan"
Feunteun
Preston Bruce
Project Grayskull
Quentin Kowalski, of the Golden Chalice Euthanatoi
Rakhi Chauduri
Ralph Young
Ramnesis
Random Madness
Raphael Bressel
Rib
Richard "Dick" Goodyear
Richard Addy
Richard Javier "Blaque" Stephenson
Richard M. Alchemist
Richard Morris
Richard Ross
Rob Carroll
Robert Huether
Robert Sullivan
Ronaldo Mascarenhas
Ross MacKenzie
Rostislav Tumanov
Rosto Lasombra
Roxane Tourigny
Ryan "The Magician" Van Every
Ryan Adair Green
S J Jennings
S Leigh Schmidt
Sahajiya Al Provance
Sandra Damiana Buskirk
Sapphire Balseraph
Sarah
Scott Alvarado
Scott Andrews
Scott Hamilton
Scott Rick
Scott Wachter
Sean Casey
Sebastian Lindeberg
Sebastian T. Gebski
Sergio Jaimez Rivas
Shan Wolf
Shannon Keniry
Shawn Campbell
Shawn M Moore
Sibyl Corvix
Silence Dogood
silversaint
Sir Norvil McGee, Capt. SS Boulon-Blairaeu
Sophia Jessamyn Baron
Soreth
Sparrow
St. Augustine
Stacy M. Gossett
Star-Star
Sten Bugge
Stephen Childs
Stephen Delear
Steve Cotterill
Steve Shearer
Steven S. Long
Sven Holub
Sylvain "Sly" Pronovost
T. L. "Hotwire" Webb
Talia Dumarc
Tamasis
Tapani Tiilikainen
Tavis Charles
Team Miller
Tessa St. Claire
The Black Gaming Club
The Eye of Night
The Plaid Mentat
The Wildfire Clan
Theo
Thomas and Megan Thompson
Thomas Gerlick
Thomas Gronek
Thomas White
Thomas Wolf
Tikaani Yuralria
Tobias Dornbusch
Tom Breeze
Tom Wilkinson
Tony Love
Toran
Touri
Travis Legge
Trish Pettinati and Stephen Michael DiPesa
Tristan Hendrick-Beattie
Two Wolves
Tyler Foss
V. Rantavalli
Vincent
violinjosh
Vise
Vutshishl
Wade Jones
Wade Rothchild
Walking Storm
Walter Soto
Walter Torcatte
Wei-Hua Hsieh
William Duhane Tarvol bani Flambeau
William Ruby
Wong Kum Yew
Wren Wicks
Yone Santana
Zak Kotlow
Zed Lopez
Zeke Hubris
Zhaph
Zoviir

Adam "Karpomatic" Karpolorich
Alastor Doyle
Alon Krause
Anne Petersen
Arnodd "Hrafn" Heiriksson
Ashton Knight
Chris Mortika
Colin Rosario
Crystal A. Chappelle
D.A Lascelles
Damien Hunter
Dan Hagy
Dannoh Cohen
David Stanley
DharkMojo

Doctor Stephen Vincent Strange
elhuevo
Gargamel Le Noir
Greg Peterson
Gustavo Felipe de Oliveira
Harry Dresden
Ian "Professor Atlas" Irelan
Irog Silenzo
Jace C.
Jaime Robertson
Jamie0
Jason L
Jennifer Etsu - Hollow One
Jennifer Weinstein
Joseph Keenan
Kailindorian
Manlio Calvi
Mark Schmidt
Melanie Kiviaq
Morik Trask
Nathan Soderland
Paradox Captain
PatrickH
R.A. Mc Reynolds
ReverendRumbleFish
Ria Loader
Richard "Morningstar" Rossato
Rob R.
Robbie Laoten
Robert F Towell
Rocjol
Russel Lee
Ryan Mathes
S2 "D" Kahler
Sarah M Stewart
Steven Eubanks
Steven Maloney
Ted Stephens
Tobias Gottschalk
Tom Doncom
Vincent Pasko
Wes Frazier
wraith808
Yes

Alexander "Kuein" Yatskov
Capricia Bruns
Carlos Federico Pedraza Gutierrez
Chris 'AkatsukiLeader13' Gawne
Darell Lubahn
Elijah Grey
John Walter Biles
Josh Loomis
Kevin Harrison
Leishmaniose DeLira
Nick B. & Kate O.
No.5127
Romaine, Capo, Shell, Airy, Muse, and Chokecherry
Salem"Voodooking"Mathius
Tom Ladegard
Will Hudson

Alyssa Curby
Aymeric Lancien
Ben Fitzpatrick
Brandon Logan
Brian "Fuzzy Mushroom Head" Speicher
Brian Wheeler
Cameron Wise
Christopher Farrington
Damien Carmichael
Declan O'Neill
Gunnar Högberg
Hrvoje Ruhek
Ian Morgenheim
Illarion Andrykovich
James Camilleri
Joe Thater
John "johnkzin" Rudd
Kenny Crowe
Luca "Gotrek" Barcella
Lucas Gallindo
Matthew Roark
Mike de Jong
Nicole Mezzasalma
Omar Sanchez
Paul Hayes
Phil Stafford
PsyCow
Redavatar
S. R. Dreamholde
Scott Elmer
Simbelmyne
Stephen Egolf
Steven Matthews
Thierry Nouza
Tim Bogosh
tindal
Vicente Sampedro
Zack Kline

Alejandro J. de León
Alexander Lambert
Andrea Colonna
Andrew Kirschbaum
Andros Baphomet
Aphrae Lovelace
Ben Fifield
Clifton James F. Sawit
Danny Fisher
David B. Mitchell
Derek C Taylor
Dorothy P.
Doug & Joy Staudt
Dustin Rector
Elias Helfer
Emiliano "Ethrigant
D´Pendrakken" Zeni
Estrella Vinces
Ethan Bremner
Frederick Black the Shadowdancer
Fredric Dalqvist
George Henry Hepker VI
Gilgamesh Hale
Han Lim
Hex Arcana
Ian D. Ward
Ian Schanning
Irene "Running Gag" Posey, Nuwisha supporter of the fantastical
J Moore
J.R. Farley
James "Jimbojones" Robertson
Jason Waltz
Joe Pridham
John & Audrey Cook
Joshua Epperson
Kenneth Lathan
Kevin Ross Rogers
Masani McGee
Matt Shursen
Matthew Madden
Mike Eckman
Oscar Ulloa
Paul Prescott
Professor Highland Wolland
Reyhan Sadaka
Scott Cosner
Shafi Ziauddin
Sir Chris
Sophie Mächtl
Stephen Bond
Steven Owen
Steveotep
THE Adam Warlock (Accept No Substitutes)
Thomas Faine
Thomas George Huber Jr.
Thomas O'Gorman
Will Sayart

Albert L Perrien II
Clayton Weeks
Coyote WalkingTall
Dan Summers
Dave "Wintergreen" Harrison
David B. Feig
David Dalton
Fernando Jacobson
George Koutsikos
Jacob Dylan Riddle
jason "Ulysses Minor" bean
Jessica Pitre Jones
John Courage
John D. Cornelius
Joseph Stonecraft, Master Etherical Scientist
Joseph W. Berriman
Nathanael Espino aka Rin Kyrilson,D.Thau.
Nicholas Muehlenweg
Perl
Ray Hegge
Rebecca "Rhiannon O'Reilley" Tordoff
Rebekah "Demoness" Sloan
Rich Beaulieu
Sean Padgett
Simon "Pykon" Baptista
spiderglow
Stephen Drew (Raama)
Steve Lord
Surrey Borges
Teppo Pennanen
Teru
Wizzat

Mage

"Bogey" Williams
/tg/
Aaron & Heidi Chiles
Aaron Buttery
Aaron Denney
Aaron Nowack
Aaron Reimer
Aaron Scott
Adam "Beacon" Strangelove
Adam "WhirlwindMonk" Bednarek
Adam Bosman
Adam Graham
Adam Koebel
Adam Kost
Adam Kroll
Adam Krump
Adam Thomas-Brashier
Adam Waggenspack
Adam Zielinski
Adept Paragon Julian duCharbaine, PhD; Comte de Toulouse bani Bonisagus
Adrian Hughson
Adrian Masters
Adrien & Kim Ladouceur
Aidenn Ossorio & Rain Pletcher
Akariel Ford
Akili Daniels
Alan Gill
Alanna "Firebug" McAllen
Albert Schroter
Alec "Michel" Wills
Alec Whitney
Alex Lavoie
Alex 'Munk' Munkelwitz

Alex Putman
Alex 'Roman' DiSanpietro
Alex Wawro
Alexander Chobot
Alexander Ducharme
Alice King
Alice Lanteigne
Alt255
Amanda Plageman
Amber Lind
Amber Vietzke
Amdramnar
Ammariel Melwasul
Anadrell
André Gagné
Andrew "Operative Kyle Quintana, Amalgam NM-027" Cummings
Andrew Cherry
Andrew Twyman
Andy Rosequist
Andy Zeiner
Anna Fae
Annida Christofi-Clark
Anonymous
Anonymous
Anthony "Iris" Kuchta
Anthony Damiani
Anthony Howell
Anthony Rybarczyk
Arden Mors
arthexis
Ashley Paschal
Asmoor
Atomic "Jason Best" Dragonpuncher
Aubrey Lavigne
Austin Haught
Azriel
Azryela Abysma
Barra Sargtlin
Bartleby
Bearhat Walker
Becca Bowen
Becksworth Was Here'); DROP ALL TABLES;
Becky Smith
Ben "Damocles Thread" Walker
Ben Dinsmore
Ben Rosenblum
Ben W Bell
Ben Willcox
Ben Woerner, bani Thig
Benoit Devost
Big Money Butz
Billy Thatcher
BJ "Kit" McManus
Blogg
Bob Bonsall
Brannen
Brendan McCann
Brennen "Merik Lance" Willer
Brent Cerrato
Bret Anderson
Brian & Allison Dellinger
Brian Campbell
Brian Griffith
Brian J Phillip
Brian Johnson
Brian K. Scott
Brian Koonce
Brian Lynch
Brian Misamore
Brian Poe
Brian Weir
Brian Zuber
Bryan "Kaelten" McLemore
Bryant Durrell
Bryce Perry
Budgie
Cade MacTire
CAGWorks
Capritisha the Forsaken
Carl Pilon
Carlos Ovalle
Carlos Restrepo
Carolyn Lachance
Carraig Heldon
Casey DeWitt
Casey Geyer
Cassandra Matteis
Catch22
Cerigo
Chaas Cordero
Chad Hazel-Kepler
Chad S. Pendreki
Chainsaw Todd
Charles A. Wright
Charles Brown
Charles Minucie
Charlie Vick
Cheryl Nortz
Chris "Shallow-Tracks" Shaffer
Chris "Technovandal" Harvey
Chris Allen
Chris Brashier
Chris Chaney
Chris Cowger
Chris Harrington
Chris Huddleston
Chris Johnson
Chris Moreno
Chris Roames
Chris Smaldone
Chris Snyder
Christian Walters
Christopher Buser
Christopher Coward
Christopher Kobbe
Christopher Pelletier bani Alexandrian Society
Christopher Penczak
Christopher V. Martin
Christopher W Smythe
Clan Ekotusay
Claude Marlte-Olvier
Clone #731
Cochi Hirogawa
Cody L. Dobbs
Colin Fredericks
Cora Anderson
Corey Reddin
Cory Eicher
Cory Hodge
Craig Gaddis
Craig M. Smith
crawlkill
Creagan MacCairngorm
Crothian
CtrlAltFaceroll
Curtis Montgomery
Curtis Uvon Grogins JR
Cynesra James
Dan Goldberg
Dan Sanford
Dana Myers
Dane Breker
Dani 'Borogove' Barnsley
Daniel "Damon Cane" Wright
Daniel Arbuckle
Daniel B Nissman
Daniel C. Mainwaring
Daniel Hillen
Daniel Purdy
Daniel Quinn
Daniel Scribner
Daniel Sellers
Danisty Paisley
Dante Argyle
Dante Laughing-Coyote
Dante527
Darcey Wunker
Darius Westchester
Darker Days Radio
Darren MacNeil
Darryl Green
Darryl Park
Daru
Daryl Markey
Daryl McLaurine, Ph.D.
Dave "Hamza" Bruno
Dave Scheidecker
David "Glitz" Levesque
David Brekelmans
David Carroll
David Drewelow
David E. Melgar
David Kusy
David Michael Felt
David Miller
David Paul
David Reed
David Stoddard
David Tapanes
David Turner
Decerto
Deke Reisig
derekticon
Devin P. Owens
Doc Rampart
Doctor Ion
Doctor Malcolm Addler, Member in Good Standing of the Hermetic Orders bani Flambeau, Masgister Mundi Ars Essentiae and Copperfield.
Doctor Marigold Farmer
Dolce Miryam
Don Moonglow
Doongar
Doug Nordwall
Douglass Kern
Dr. Jimmy
Dr. Luke Maynard
Dr. Rev. Diamond J, K.S.C.
Dr. Scott Hedberg
Dr. Walter Lesko
Dr. Zharkov
Drake Williams
Drew Mays
Drew Price
Duckie
Dustin D. Dalton
Dustin Dickerson
Dustin Schmidt
Dusty Hodges
Dylan "Z" Knight
Dylan Boates
Eben Lowe
Edward Carpenter
Edward Monical-Vuylsteke
Eli Cross
Elil
Elizabeth Salazar
Enzo Christiano
Erebus & Ariadne Cote
Eric Hutchings-Goetz
Eric Nail
Eric Nathaniel M. Henson
Eric Sikora
Erik Bear
Erik Rutherford Cartman bani Flambeau of the Order of Hermes
Eris Avery Redwood
Ethan Renwood
Eustache Porrihma
Evan Jeffrey
Evelyn & Nigel
Exonym
flowerysong
Forrest Lee Spilker
Forrest McKinley
François Boucher
Frank "Satori" Toich
Frank Marshall
Freja Tsukikage
Gabriel
Gabriel heraldstorm
Gabriel Miller
Gabriel Sorrel
Galen Fabic
Garth deumbra
Gary "Madu" Montgomery
Gary Berg
Genevieve Robinson
Geoff Vogel
Geoffar
George Pitre
Gestalt Valance
Geza Letso
Gideon Nightshade
Gilbert MIlner
Glen Adams

Glen Barrett
Goresnout
Greg Engel
Greg Freeman
Greg Roy
Greg Scott Neuman
Gwydion Angus McBryde
H.C.
Harvey Spectre
Harvin Torres
Heather A. Harrelson
Heather Claudia Chastity Alexandria Snyder Ira
Henry Jones
Himeko Hoshino
HOGAR!!!
Holden Shearer
Hopesend
Horatio Hex
Iago Drake
Ian Blackmer
Ian Nusskern
Ian R
Ian Sargeant
Iarlais
Ignatius Montenegro
Indraneel Dutt
J. Anthony Malerich
J. H. Frank
J. Noah Wiley
J.D. Cohen
J.J. & Lana Mason
Jack and Gloria Kelnhofer
Jack Thompson
Jacob Juenger
Jacob Osterhaus
Jaime M Garmendia III
Jaime Sandoval
Jake Street & Rick Woods
Jamal Freeman and Reverend
James Daniel
James "Tony" Hudson
James (Christian Faulds) Einsbrook
James Chatham
James Estes
James Havelocke
James L Hays
James Nelson
James Pierson
Janus Warlock
Jared Buckley
Jared Fattmann
Jared Knight Leadbetter
Jared Koon
Jaron Kaplan-Parr
Jasmine Black
Jason & Amy Berteotti
Jason C Marshall
Jason Kenney
Jason MacGillivray
Jason Marks
Jason Martinez
Jason Nell
Jason Parachoniak
Jason R Goodwin
Jason Stierle
Jayashi Devyani
JD Langeland
Jeff Clark
Jeff Ewing
Jeffery Bishop
Jeffrey LaLuc
Jeffrey Palmer
Jeffrey Taylor
JEG
Jen Kuipers
Jen1701D
Jenn Kellam
Jennifer Jenkins
Jeremey D Walker
Jeremiah Marquette
Jeremy "opsirus" Roberts
Jeremy Kostiew
Jeremy Purdom
Jeremy Putman
Jeremy Zimmerman
Jerimiah Whitmer of House Bonisagus
Jesse Larson
Jesse Mazer
Jessica Reardon Smith
Jessica Yates Martin
Jim Jones
Jim Morrison
Joe "Big Dog" Bianco
Joe Fusion
Joel Scott
John & Kimberly Poole
John Abbott
John Armstrong
John Carnathan
John Cooey
John DiPietro, Jr.
John Lovejoy
John Niceley
John Olszewski
John Paulus
jon hicks
Jon Lang
Jonas Beardsley
Jonathan D. Harter
Jonathan Lafortune
Jonathan Osterhaus
Jonathan Reichman
Jonathon Burgess
Joseph Krause
Joseph Russo
Joseph Surico
Joshua fairfield
Joshua Mayworth, bani Tytalus
Joshua Pluta
Julia Czarniecki
Julian Siano
Justin Carroll
Justin Delaney
Justin Michael
Kahir de Umbras
Kaliban
Katelynn Guerra
Katy Crumb
Kaydence 'K0ticQt' Phillips
Keegan Clements-Housser
Keith Rice
Kelly Schultz
Kerrus Magrus
Kevin "Seamus" Barrett
Kevin DeVormer
Kevin Mueller
Kevin Wolfe
Kim Miller
Kimberly Horne
Kitt Byth
Kodeir Ralford
Kristopher Deters
Kyle A. Fisher
Kyle Jonas Ross
Kyle Rimmer
Kyle Wiley
Lafing Cat
Laine "Glaistig" DeLaney
Larry "Halacon" Odom
Larry Castleberry
Le Mateo
Lee Beckers
Lee Dignam
Lee Leggett
Lee Nicholson
Lee Taber
Leif Hassell
Leo "The Dilsnik" Navas
Leo Gentile
Leslie Jones
Lester Ward
Lindsay McNulty
Logan MacCaskill
Lorrraine
Louis Malis
Lucas and Megan Engelhardt
Lucas McCauslin
Lucyfersam
Luke Iehl
Lydia "Frost" Herbison
Lydia Eickstaedt
Lyinggod
M Newton Moore
Madeupasaurus-Rex
Magentawolf
Majdi Badri
Malcolm Sheppard and Jupiter's Forge
Marc Ouimet
Marc-André Perreault
Marco Palou
Mario Breton
Mark Allen
Mark 'Keleas' Webb
Mark Lozano
Mark Thompson
Mark van Esch
Marlja
Martin W. Capdevielle
Mason
Mason Jones
Mason Jones
Mathieu Bellemare
Matt "Catapult" Wang
Matt "Toasty" Homentosky
Matt Carman
Matt Davis
Matt Donaldson
Matt Duval
Matt Jett
Matt Murphy
MatThePhat
Matthew Ashby
Matthew Hedge
Matthew Jacoby
Matthew Lynn
Matthew M Middleton
Matthew Oakes
Matthew Solomon
Megan
Megan K. McGuire
Melissa Krause
Melpomene White
Mereneith de Passerohé, e Merceri
Michael "Marsh" Marshall
Michael "Xail" Durrell
Michael & Danielle
Michael Bowman
Michael G.
Michael Hopkins
Michael Kilduff
Michael Parra
Michael Richards
Michael Sims
Michael Watts
Michael Zenke
Michelle Boucher
Mike Delaney
Mike Maxson
Mike Rotch
Miles Ward
Mitch Gross
Natasha Grey
Nate Adams
Nathan Fraser
Nathan Henderson
Nathan Legg
Nathan Mitchell
Nathan Newlon
Nathan Rush
Nathaniel Ogilvie
Nathaniel Rogers
Neall Raemonn Price
Nejlah Al-Rahab- Gangrel Antitribu
Nicholas A. DeLateur
Nicholas Alexander Holmgren
Nicholas Kirkpatrick
Nicholas McDylan
Nicholas Racz
Nicholas Richardson
Nick Pilon & Sasha Dillman
Nicole Porter
Nicos Sphaeridian
Nikela Hartman
Norngremlin
Omer Ahmed
Orren Locke
Outlander
Owen Wesley Kerschner

Oz Sozen
Patrick Fagan
Patrick Harron
Patrick Knowles
Patrick O'Leary>Fianchetto
Patrick Sullivan
Patrick, Order of the Dawning Truth
Paul "The Voice" Boudreau
Paul Davis
Paul J. Banyai
Paul Reed
Peter Engebos
Peter H Krulder II
Peter Nielsen
Peter Vescera
Philip Weston
Phill Calle
Pieter Spealman
Pina's, Matthew "Mongol" & Ashley "Renegade"
Pip Padden
PJ Frack
PJ Saad
Posey
pr0xy
Pratigya Mehta
Preston Lee Bobo
Prospero
qazinus
Qu33qu3g, Proprietor of the Pequod Cafe
Rachel Cardul bani Tytalus
Raefex
Ralph C. Lacy IV
Rand Brittain
Randi Condrey-Babino
Ray C. Spees
Rebecca Smythe
Reuben Israel Beattie
Rev. Malcus Dorroga
Rhea Shelley
Rhian Slane
Rich Warren
Richard Chilton
Richard Gault
Richard Pruiett
Richard Taylor
Ritin Black
Rob Carlos
Robert L. Flowers Jr.
Robert MacNinch
Robert T. Sagris
Roberto Hoyle
Roland Phoenix and Morgan Greywolf
ROS - Gabriel Rhys
ROS - Leviticus Mason
ROS - Unit Nine
Rosetta
Ross Thomas
Rowena de Galliarde
Roxane Sabourin
Roy Berman
Ruben Catinchi
Rurik Dimanevsky
Ryan Evans
Ryan Gracey
Ryan Owens
S L Koch
S. Snyder
Saleem Halabi
Sam Feipel
Sam Spencer
Sanzuwu
Sara Stewart
Sarah Perry-Shipp
Schatzie!
Scott Kendrick
Scott Michael Coutcher bani Tytalus
Scott Shapiro
Scott Sytten
Sean Dial
Sean M. Dunstan
Sean Mattox
Sean Schbley
Sean Silva-Miramon
Sean W
SeanPatrick Zeitler
Senji Sassinak
Shane Phillips
Shannon Patrick
Shaun McRae
Shauna Forrister
Shawn Becker
Shelby
Shelton Windham
Shoshana Kessock
Simon Kelly Hale
Sir Gor
Skarsol
Skeleton Jack
Skye "skyknyt" Knighton
SOLtien
Star Eagle
Stephen Beck Fey
Stephen Lea Sheppard
Stephen M. Pomeroy
Stephen Post
Sterling Hitchcock
Sterling R. Gustin
Steve "Hedgehog39" Rubio
Steve & Katherine Magana
Steve Darnell
Steve Hinck
Steve Musal, US2002126981
Steven Thesken
Tam and Danks
Tathel
Ted Ludemann
Ted Pertzborn
Tentaclese McTentacles
Teresa Oswald
Terrance Colligan
The Crazy Player
The Feingolds
TheAIY
Thomas Blackstone
Thomas Devine
Thomas H. Elsom
Thomas McGee
Thomas Slaughter
Tiffany Pusatello and Stacie Bullough
Tim Boser
Tim Darr
Tim Rich
Tim Warman
Timothy A. Gurno II
Timothy Flanders
Timothy Jay
TJ Wilson
Todd Thomas
Tom Bither
Tommie Boatwright
Tommy "all worlds are open to me" G.
Tony Adkins
Tracy Pinkelton
Travis Foster
Treesong
Trevor Stamper
Tristan Vann
Tronoth Sarum
Tucker Brown
Tyler Dion
Tym Keeney
Ululi
Val Wikblad
Veros
Victor "Sylvan" Allen
Victor Fiszer
Vijay Kiran Challa
Vincent Longobardi
Violet R. Hargreaves, Cogsmith, Society of Ether
Vitamancer
Voltarin Ravenstorm
Wayne Seeger
Wayne Welgush
Wei-min Fong
Wesley Norman
Weston Harper
WH1P[VA]
William Franks
William Rodrigue
Wolfgar Amadeus Malcolm Lyles Xander
Yamaguchi Shimeiko (山口死命子)
Yatziri Rodriguez
Yener Balci
Zachary Holman
Zakkary Ahern
Zhimar
Zoey Starr
Zombie Orpheus Entertainment

"Doc" Tomas Sparks
"Rabbi" Rueben Schwartz
"Thothmes" Mathew Rush
A. "Doc Wonder" Walker
A. Leslie
A. Quentin Murlin
Aariea
Aaron "Siphon" Woodside
Aaron C. McLaughlin
Aaron J Lowry
Aaron J. Schrader
Aaron McKay
Aaron Riutta
Abraham Garcia
Adam Debus
Adam L
Adam Mock
Agent Fountainpen
Aiden Finney
Aishlynn L'blanc
Alberto Arias S
Alec McClain
Alex Barth
Alex Flagg
Alex Putnam
Alexandra Petra Cadia Lleras
Alexis & Jeremy
Alexis Michailidou
Alison Gill
Allan Jenkinson
Alonso O. Rubio
Alyssia Ashkevron
Amelia "Sid" Weston - Verbena Disciple
Ancellius
Ander Rabann
Andrés Lazcano
Andrés Montañez
Andrés Rodríguez
Andrew "Roll Damage" Ulrich
Andrew Cermak
Andrew Goodman
Andrew Graham aka Kain the Seeker
Andrew Heston
Andrew Jay Cardinal
Andrew Laliberte
Andrew Lenk, Virtual Adept and survivor of Bloody Mary
Andrew P Gibson
Andrew R Nagel
Andrew Stephen Coombs
Andrew Weston
Andy Blanchard
Andy Colson
Angelborn
Anonymous
Anthony 'Islefox' Blea
Anthony Jennings
Antoine Mistral
Ariketh
Arthur "Torakhan" Dreese
Ashwyn Faust
Austin Goodnight
babelMatrix
Babylon Sanctum
bastsbreath
Baxter Johann Flynn
Beachfox
Bekkua
Ben Loukota
Benjamin "eSca" Reed
Benjamin R. Terry
Benjamin Yamada
Bia Paige

Big L
Bill James
Bill Shaffer
Blake Thomas
Bob Harrison
Bob Jones
Bob Ooton
Boomer H.
Brad Bazor
Brad D. Kane
Bradley Yesko
Brandon Duarte
Brendan Sullivan
Brendan Thomas
Brent Erdman
Brian Leist
Brian Quinn
Brianne M. Sifert
Bridget Bishop
Brion M.
Bruno Durivage
Bulgroth Kral
Bulshock
C. Martin Coulter
C.J. Short
C.W.Richeson
Caitlin Eckert
Caitlin O'Brien
Caity Grace
Cale Hawthorne
Caleb "Mahto" Schuller
Calum Russel
Calvin D. Jim
Cameron Loewen
Cameron Wright
cantrip
Capt. O'Malley
Captain Cyril Thunder, RES, Sky Calvary
Carrie Scott
Cecoyotl
Cedryck Mimault
Cesar Cesarotti
Chad "Tecrogue" Long
Chad Griffith
Chance Thorton
Charlie "PookaKnight" Cantrell
Chasym
Chris "Diablerist" Hitchcock
Chris "Vengeance" Green
Chris Aronen
Chris Bell
Chris Briley
Chris Carpinello
Chris Collins
Chris Czerniak
Chris Dyer
Chris Lavin
Chris Mancuso
Chris Taylor
Chris Tulach
Chris Tyk;
A friend of John Courage
Chris White
Chris Woodruff
Christina "Moira Angela Darling" Backus
Christoph Schulz
Christopher "Dragon" Sloan
Christopher Avery
Christopher Campione
Christopher Skeen
Chuck and Rebecca Rozakis
CLAN PLOEGER
Clémence Dufresne
Clete D. Collum
Cliff Winnig
Collin "Maleclypse" Smith
Connor Hallisey
Conor Tuohy
Constantine Thomas
Corey Alambar
Corin James
Cory Williamsen
Craig Bonnes
Craig Nuckels
Crystal Amara Corrigan
Cydrake
D Sonderling
D.J. Trindle
Dace
Daggothus
Dak F Powers
Damien Starlurker
Dan & Chaney Edwards
Dan and Lindsey Brounstein
Dan Charland
Dan Keller
Dan Luxenberg
Dan Williams
Dana Bayer
Dane "Kota" Allington
Daniel "Dukal" Bell
Daniel "Hunting Moon" Weber
Daniel "The Nameless1" Gaghan
Daniel and Jessica Daubenspeck
Daniel Balderas
Daniel C. Barton
Daniel H. Spain
Daniel Ingraham
Daniel Stack
Daniel Suzzi
Daniel Yauger
darksfallen
Dashekita N. Brooks
Dave Ferguson
Dave Glasser
David "Freerun" Bryan
David "JustDave" Talboy
David Barasch
David Bresson
David Doucey
David Futterrer
David H. Clements
David Harrison
David Huston
David K Uspal
David M Sylvia
David McFall
David Viars
David Weidendorf
David Yellope
Dean Steward
Del
Dennis V. Stanley
Derek Guder
Derek the Bard
Desdemona Pumpernickel
Devoid-Q
Devon Troy
Diaz Del Fuego
Dick Willmeth
Diego "Juanca" Ubago
Dione Rameses
DJ V0ltage
Doc Saturn
Doctor Stephen Vincent Strange, Sorcerer Supreme
Don
Don Cleary
Don Enzo Benetti
Don Tucker
Donnie "Lord Aludian" Roos, Jr.
Doug Atkinson
Doug Grayson, Steven Evans, Obediah "Ark" Jackson
Doug Seipel
Dr. Mina "Impossible" Steponavitch
Drew and Tia McLeroy
Drew Littell
Drew Tattrie
Dylan Guerrero
Dylan Muttram
Dyne Atol
E. C. Saulness
E. G. J. Weston
Ed Shannon
Edward Thane, Nethermancer
Eifion Jones
Elisia Ragaller
Elizabeth Leggett
Emily Brumfield & Susann Hessen
Emily McCabe
Enedino Fernandez
Enigma
EnnuiStreet
Enoch "Dancing Bat" Ulmer
Eric Casey
Eric Danz
Eric France
Erin Ruston
Ernie "pookie" LaFountain
ErusUmbros
Etienne Lapointe-Blackburn
Evan "JabberWokky" and Sarah Edwards
Evan Manchester
Evan Myers
Evan Odensky
Evo Shandor (aka Scott R)
Fawn Galbraith, Dreamspeaker
François Labaye
Frank Marcelli
Fred Herman
Frequency
G. Allen Johnson
Gabe Moreno
Gabe Palkert
Gabriel Vogt
Garon Niehaus
Gary R Smith II
George Redson
German Andres Naranjo Faccini
goeticgeek
Gordon "Eldagusto" G. Gordon
Grady McEwen
Grant "Richard Prescott" Parsons
Grant G. Gruenbaum
Greg Foster
Greg Meyer
Greg Tipton
Greg Walters
Gregory Bullard
Grynner
Guillaume Tremblay
Gunther Pendercoste
Guy Seggev
guyblade
Håkon Odinson
Haroon Alsaif
Heathbrook Rowan Badhwar
Heather Shannon
Helical Scorn
Henry F. Bruckman Vargas
Herbert Nowell
Holden 'Abhaya' Kormos
Hugo Richard
Ian A. A. Watson
Ian Hamilton
Ian Roberson
Ian S. Frazier
Ikalios
Invasor Odin
Isaac Carr
J Desaulniers - Alberta
J. Brad Hicks
J. James Craig
J. Romero
J.P. Anderson
Jack Armstrong
Jackson Page
James "Speaks-with-Pups" Wagner
James & JP Sugarbroad
James ChaoticCore Roberts
James L. Bell
James May
James Morr
James T.
Janessa Tjara Portner
Jared Shaver
Jarys "Helios" Maragopoulos
Jason and Kai Wodicka
Jason Brannen
Jason Dickerson
Jason Freston
Jason Geis
Jason Levine

Jason Ludwig
Jason Parker
Jason T. DeForge
Javier "Maren" Morante
Javier Palenzuela
Jayna Pavlin
JAYSON "the14thguest" TURNER
JC Spears
Jean-François Burroughs
Jean-François Dufresne
Jean-Francois Ethier
Jeff "Shadow" Fowler
Jeff 'Boo Boo' Jones
Jeff Zitomer
Jeffrey Pittman
Jeffrey S. James
Jeffrey Taylor
Jenni Marion Foggo
Jeremy "JDazzle" Marshall
Jeremy Danielson
Jeremy Marshall
Jerrin Strongblade
Jesse "Octavo" Webster
Jesse Butler
Jesse J. Burnette
Jessica "Sp00ky" Smith
Jessica Gains
Jessica Tabbard
Jessy Tremblay-Bigras
Jim Burdo
Jim Flood
Jim Groves
Jim H. Henderson
Jimmy 'Kestrel' Acevedo
Jinriksha
JLL
J-M DeFoggi
Jody Bowman
Joe Page
Joe Dunham
Joe McGinnis
Joe Parrino
Joe Ragsdale
Joel "Pika" Keeney
John "Wolfe" Kelley
John Arthur Bartley III
John C Spainhour
John Henley
John J Kaufman
John P. Baggett
John R. Trapasso
Johnathon "Icarus" Foulk
Johnny Gutwound
Jonathan D. Head
Jonathan Whyte
Jonathon Blade
Jonci Aguillard
Jordan Manis
Joseph Andrew Hill
Joseph Cottin
Joseph Lonergan
Joseph Oliveira
Josh "dalarpguy" Parrish
Joshua Ramsey
Jude Vais
Julian Krause
Justin Caletges
Justin Deneke
Justin Haruo Sawai
Justin Jones
Justin Melton
Justin Tack
Kacie Shelton
Karen Yurek
Karl Fournier
Karl Latrémouille bani Rien
Karl Pamona
Kat Tyler
Kat: The long suffering, purple-daisied, omni-dimensional tea pot
Kate Gryn
Kathryn McKay
Katt T Awesome
Kaze Velara
Ken Burling
Kenny Beale
Kerry Birmingham
Kevin "Norus" Boisvert
Kevin & Sarah Williams
Kevin Andrew Murphy
Kevin C. Wong
Kevin Caldwell
Kevin Lewis
Khaos Nitemare
Kimberly Morris
Kirk Foote
Kneedles
Kody W. Stinson
Komplx
Korusef
Kraig Blackwelder
Krys Rose
Kurt McMahon
Kyle Krebs
Kyle McCarty
Kyle Niedzwiecki
Kyle Patrick Brennan
L. David Napier II
Lachrymite
Lars Haymaker
Lawrence Stranges
Leonard Helding
Leoza Ranza
Levin Serra
Liang Hei
Lilliandrei Sohor
LiQUiD
Logan Ratica
Lostinplace
Luke Brewer
Luke Van Buren
Lynn L262 Ryers
M Arendt
M. Publius Warsop
Maggie "Neon" Keller
Magister Arthington
Magister Guigui bani Awesome
Magus
Magus Vox Anteron
Malcolm John Brown
Mansa Dorhej
Marc Kuczborski "Londonmarc"
Marc Larouche
Marc-André Laurence
Marcel G. Paler Jr.
Marcus "Eagle" Landry
Marcus Maniakes
Marcus Xavier Figuerola
Mario Baumann
Mark A Moore
Mark Adair
Mark Austin Fleming
Mark Cockerham
Mark Hobson
Mark Kung
Mark Roemer
Matt and Miranda Gnepper
Matt Hufstetler
Matthew "Frater Ramadan" Boren
Matthew "Proffel" Proehl
Matthew (Elnaur) Smith
Matthew C Snyder
Matthew Casella
Matthew Dames
Matthew Dashner
Matthew Finco
Matthew Gorsky
Matthew Horoszowski
Matthew Koelling
Matthew Laine
Matthew Pauze
Matthew Smithwick bani Tytalus
Matthew York
Maverick & Veronica 5ever
Max Nevill
Max Peters
Meaghan Bullock
Megan "Nezumi" Greathouse
Methandrela
Michael
Michael "Benji" Hall
Michael Greaney
Michael Homola Jr.
Michael J. Chernicoff
Michael Jacobson
Michael Kiesling
Michael M Kelly
Michael Martinus
Michael Matthews
Michael Nightingale
Michael P. Buono
Michael Patrick Benedictus Foight
Michael Pietrelli
Michael Rhodd AkA Sir Noir
Michael S. Follis
Michael Tousignant
Michael W. Robins
Michelle Golz
Micro
Mikaleon
Mike & Brian Goubeaux
Mike Macary
Mike Montgomery
Mike Todd
Mitchell Roggeveen
Morgan Weeks
Morpheus Constantine
Morrvainum Bani Ex Miscellanea
Mortain
Mranth Kumpf
Mrs. René A. Vandros

N8 V.
Nathan Andrew John Laskey
Nathaneal Vogeding
Neal MacIntyre
Neale Carter
Nicholas Davis
Nick Keyuravong
Nick wingedferret Brown
Nicodemus Locke
Nicolas Chrétien bani Tremere
Nik Caruso
Nikika Giovanni
Nikki Koulouris
Noble Thayer Graves, Former Euthanatos, now Clan Tremere
Nolan White
Noqoilpi (the Gambler)
Norma Lyons
Noskavian
Octavio Arango
Odanuki
Oliver Reed
Olivier Jobin
Olotie Lothwen
Orin Spiess
Orion
Orphan Jim
Oukan Koshiro
O'ulana Mhasi
Owen Milton
PABB
Pat Bedua
Pat Doherty
Patrick "Scarabus" Hanna
Patrick and Michelle Cunningham
Patrick Dunn
Patrick E. Bright
Patrick Hutchison
Patrick Walters
Paul (Farwalker) Smith
Paul A Timm
Paul I Bever Jr
Paul Stefko
Pete Woodworth
Peter "Nekose" Rucker
Phil Brown
Philip "Pip!" Martinez
Philip Grassie
Phillip Gleason
Preston Davis, Hermes bani Xaos
Prof. Abel Redstone, bani Shaea
Professeur K
Professor Absinthe
Professor Skye Moonbeam
PsyberOwl
Quark O'Doom
Quinn Marlowe

R. Harmon Smith
R.R. Callaway Rea
Raak
Raevyn 'Vinyl Frog' Fletcher
Randall Crawford
Randall Wald
ravenskana
Ravnicor
Regina "Onyx" O'Reilly
Reno Marino
Rev. Phillip Malerich
Rhett Greenfield
Rich "HardwareJedi" Frost
Richard and Lori Varner
Richard deMorris
Richard 'EllwynX' Ayars
Richard Forest
Richard Pundurs
Riley Glaser
Rob Belkowski
Rob Buck
Rob Gatlin
Rob Skipper
Rob Trimarco
Rob Wieland
Robb & Mike
Robert "Jefepato" Dall
Robert "Rev. Bob" Hood
Robert E Kemp
Robert Hahn
Robert Jazo
Robert Jordan
Robert L
Robert Lundgren III
Robert Majes
Robert Thomas
Roberto Flores
Robin Scott
Rogan "Etheric Librarian" Hamby
Roger Poellot-- Cult of Ecstasy, Master of Entropy
ron beck
Ron Plunket
Ronald Conner bani Hermes
Ronan Garvedian bani Order of Hermes, House Shaea
Roo Wetzel
ROS - Father Fredrick Melanchthon
Rowdy Ferret
Russ Trippett
Ryan Hinson
Ryan Porter
Ryan Reynolds
Sam Conway
Sameer Yalamanchi
Samuel (Canada) Mitson
Samuel D'Amours-Fortier
Samuel L. Van Buskirk
Samuel Sampson
Savan Gupta, Steam-Funk Studios
Scott "Duck" Bryant
Scott "The Hanged Man" McNabb Corpany
Scott Cohen
Scott Ephriam Vigil
Scott Forward
Scott Mann
Scott McIntosh
Scott Rogers Mitchell
Sean A. Ashcraft
Sean J. M. O'Connor
Sean K.I.W. Steele/Arcane
Sean Littlepage
Sebastien "Bash Bizznet" Bissonnette
Selene Dawn
Sethreich Ardestahdt
Shadowstep6
Shan "Shanathan" Morris
Shaun D. Burton
Shawn "Sutekh" Glass
Shawn Kehoe
Shawn Marier
Shawn Roberts
Shimon Klein
Shrapnel
Siguardson Baylorson
SilentSlade
Snowyrat
Someonelse (SLC=)
Soren Haurberg
Spencer Quinn
Spyke Alexander & Majack Stark
Standa Panda Bear
Stefanie Googe
Stephen Cheney
Stephen Gawrit
Steve "Korbeau" Bouchard
Steve Brule
Steve Burnett
Steve Farmer
Steve Huntsberry
Steven A. Torres-Roman
Steven Johnson
Steven McIntosh
Steven P. Alfer Jr.
Steven 'Ryudo' LaFollette
Steven Sauer
Stray Lung
Streamjumper
Sudama
Summer Breeze
Tabletop Audio
Tad Duncan
Taylor Dale Wright
Thaddeus Ryker
Thaine Hepler III
The Acarya "Matches"
The Bard
The High Lord Mhoram
The Lords of Chance
The Misfits
The Tate Fitzgerald Foundation
Thierry De Gagne
Thomas "Doc Epsilon" Young
Thomas Jason Davies
Thor "Nathaniel Greene"
Thorson Jr
Tiffany MacLean
Tim "Bear" Forster
Tim "Faileas" Dahlia
Tim Flannigan
Tim Ryan
Tobias Nufruten
Tobias Tolarian
Tom Hicks
Tommy Newcomer
Tonja Davis
Tony Bellegante
Torin
Tracy Cook
Travis Carpenter
Trevor Curtis
Trevor Gere
Tristan Marriner Boyd
Tristan T. Andersen
Troy Baker
Tute
Ty Tran
Tyler
U2mad (David Wild)
Varden Fhaling
Vaughn E Allen
Versel Leveux
Vincent "digiconda" Arebalo
Vincent Lavigne
Vincenza Romano
Walter F. Croft
Warren P Nelson
Wesley Joaquín Botham
Whitney Lee
William "The Dresden" Barnes
William bloodworth
William Halverton
William Kokolis
William Lockwood
Wolfgang "Bezalel" Xylander
Wyatt Cerilli
Xavier Gaston - Order of Hermes, House Ex Miscellanea
Xelinor
Yuyue. Sun
Zach Davis
Zachary J. Walton
Zander
Zane Graves
Zero Ishida
Zethar
Zin
Ziv Ragowsky

2nirwana
42!
Abner Rodrigues
Adrià "#942" Seguer Vicente
Aidan Menzies
Alex R
Alexander Burnett
Alexander Nikandros
Alexandre "Magnamagister" Joly
Almoni
Anastenazontas
Andara Shadowfang
Anders Westerkam
Andre Braghini
Andreas G Schramm, Speaker in Dreams, warden of the Esesfeldburg and Guest-in-Caern in Itzehoe
Andrew Roberts
Andrew Skelton
Andrzej Lepper
Andy Finnan
Angel Spiliopoulos
Anja Kraus
Anthony Ferguson, Elias Coldwood, Gh05t
Antón "Agua que Fluye"
Arman Kia
Arthur Van den Bulke
Ashiko
Avani Deo Valentine
Axel Nitsch
Baptiste 'Krazilec' Moulinier
Bashir Marlowe - House Tremere
Bastiaan Smit
Ben Johnson
Billy-Ray Gara Persephone
Bjorn, The fell handed
Boris "Borinel" Ulyanskiy
Brett SinDex Whittaker
Bruno Pereira
Butch2k
C.James Blukacz
Cameron Murtagh
Carlos Vergara
Carolius Animis
Cauê Guimarães
Ceira
Cesar da Mota
Charles Crowe
Charles Strange
Chris "Eva_Fan" Trace
Chris Reay
Christopher Williams
Claus Larsen
Cobalt
Colin Anderson
Colm O'Labhradha
Craig "Renfield286" Crowe
Craig Bishell
Craig Chapman
Craig 'VI' Slee
Dacar Arunsone
Daniel "Morthar" Wernered
Daniel dos Santos Esteves
Daniel Krongaard
Daniel Rickmann
Daniele Cappelletti
David "Davegotsu" Mann
David Bigg
David Duerschlag
David Ramsden
David Rego
David Short
Davide Orlandi
Dawidis
Dinel
Dmitry Avramenko
Doc Syonide

Dominic Ellis
Dominic Robertson
Donizeti da Silva Nunes
Dr Marc Brown
Dr. Enrique Montaño Torres
El Sombrero Diablo
Elias Ebert
Elsanor the Sage
Eoin Burke
Eol (Krzysztof Zawieja)
Erik 'Pasty White' Gärtner
Ernesto F. Montemayor a.k.a. Professor John McDougal
Esben Mølgaard
Esserhaden
Felipe Recka de Almeida
Fernando Küpper
Filip Danielsson
Fingerbone Bill
firesock
Flávio Moreira Vieira
Florent 'killerklown' Didier
Franco Frare
Ganesh Subramaniam
George Taher
Gervasio da Silva Filho
Gilmar Pozo
Giuliano "Kiusugi" Gianfriglia
Glenn Clifford
Grand Maester W
Guillaume "Nocker"
Guillaume Boutigny
HAL
Harry Richardson
Hecate_Aletheia
Helder Lavigne
Helen Orosco bani Bonisagus
Henri
Henrik Augustsson
Hermes Trismegistus
Hikaru Sumeragi
I wouldn't.
Ignacio Granados Jiménez
Ivan Orlov
Jacob "Jack" Guldbrandsen
Jakov
Jakub "Behalior" Roczniak
James Alexander Mellor
James David Robertson
James Dyer
James Walker
Jason Coleman (BinaryX)
Javier "He-who-walks-between-worlds" Montegrís
Jester Minute
Joe Arnaud
Johan
Johannes Jörgensen
Johannes Paavola
John "FearMeForIAmPink" Franglen
John K Morris
John Malan
John Yngve Fredrik Lundgren
Johnny Peng
Jonatan Wikström
Jonathan Romulo Geronimo
Jonne Arjoranta
Jose M Iglesias
Josema "Yrdin" Romeo
Juan Pablo Reyes Gómez
Jukka Koskelin
Kasper Blomdell
Kay Hoddy
Keiran Sparksman
Kevin Paul Warmerdam
Kevin Turner
Kilian Exares
Kirke Rafael
Kristensen, K.
Krzysztof Zajkowski
Lachlan Smith
Lady Margot
Láquesis Larrondo
Lau Bannenberg
Lee Rimmer
Leonard "Nik" Petit-Breuilh
Les Weathetstone
Lewis Davies
LHSimon
Liam Maguire
Lloyd Pledger
lobachevsky
Lord Boserup
Luca "Lukos" Carnevale
Lucas the Great
Luke Parsons
M. Cunningham
MADCAP
Magick Nickel
Magnus Eriksson
Magnus Lundberg
Magnus Ostergärd
Malte Schultz
Marc Collins
Marc van Wanrooij
Marcin "Forseti" Pazdziora
Marcus R. Gilman
Marino Santirso Ruiz
Mark Hunter
Marko Vojnovic
Markus Bedenk
Martin Brown
Martin Taylor
Masilmani Singh
Matthew "Random_Interrupt" Keevil
Matthew Barker
Matthew Dive
Matthew Ledgerwood
Melusine of the Roses
Merrox
Michael "Curtis" Daley
Michael Burnett
Michael D Stein
Michael Ehrhardt
Michał Januszewski
Mikael "Krank" Bergström
Mike Nudd
Mike Tidman
Mikko Leho
Mikko Parviainen
Monty "I was right about the butterfly!" Nash
Morani
Muiris Daniels
Nathaniel "Verbanotos" O'Neil
Nibbio
Nic Matuzic
Nicholas Fabergé
Niclas Holmqvist
Nihilio
Nikica Puksic
Nilson Valdevino Soares
Nimrod Jones
Ninnanuam
nirvanaheim (SHIMIZU Toshiki)
Noelor
Oliver Griffin
Oliver Hambsch
Oliver Hoffmann
Oliver Peltier
Ols Jonas Petter Olsson
Ondřej Böhm
Paaj
Pablo "Hersho" Domínguez
Pablo Andres "Charly" Bullotta
Pablo Pérez Gómez
Panagiotis 'Project Clarity' Perrakis
Pantognost
Paolla Luchetti (Destiny)
Pascal Alexander
Pascal Caillaud
Patrício Carlos Júnior
Patrick Sandoval
Patrik Nordebo
Paul "Athanase" Rollier
Paulo Marcelo Soares Brito
Paweł "nimdil" Matysiak
Peter De Kinder
Peter Gates
PhallicBoy
Phil Wheatley
Pierre E. Besedovsky
Pierre-Jean Cottalorda
Praktfulle Halvor Sehested Groenaas
Prof. Haffar, Harim
ProfessionalNihilist
Racheet
Rainer Voswinkel
Raphael Bourdot
Rasmus Nicolaj West
Raven DeBorgia
Reece Howe
Renn Ascari
Rich Harrison
Richard "Spyder" Partridge
Richard Litzkow
Robert Roig
Robert Watson
Robin Low
Rodrigo "Ezequiel Stone" D' Alecio
Rodrigo Carvalho Silva
Rui AVELINO
Rune Printzlau
Sara "Ennoia" de Lindt
SaxMan the Woolly
Saykin Ryoni
Scaut
Schlumpf
Sean Riley
Sergio Delgado
sev
Seven Tan
Shaman Loves Tania (1996)
Shaman Spiritchaser (Alexandre Dias)
Skafte
Solfi
Sondre Øverås
Sophie Islington
Søren Berthelsen Holm
Sparks
Special Agent Jack Brubeck
Spellforger
Stalks-the-Reef
Stefan Breuker
Stefano Miorelli
Stelio Passaris
Steve Symons
Stew Wilson
Stuart 'Badger' Quinton
Stuart Moreton
Suviko Korhonen
Sven Bothe
Synapse
T.R.L
Ta2' "The Eye"
Tamsyn 'Destroyer of Worlds' Kennedy
Ted A. Sanne
terminal1
Thaleia Flessa
Thalles de Mello
Théa Čapek
Theo Evans
Thomas Schindler
Thomas Trifon Giokas
Tiago Barão
Tim Everson
Tina "Tinzel" Parker
Todd Hill
Tommy Svensson
Tomsdad
Tyrellus The Mad
Víctor Jiménez Merino
Ville Ojanperä
Vincent Verhoeven
Vistani Radanavic
waelcyrge
Wajanai Snidvongs
Weltwandler
Westmark Gajhede
William Dovan
Xavier Carlier
Yoo, Seung Hyun
Yves Sprinke
Z3R0
Zeven

"Danger" Will Robinson

"Jumping" Johnny Cunningham
(un)reason
A. Vesseur
Aaron Hays
Abhsalonikas Benaeliz
Adam "Shadowfox" Tullett
Adam Nathanson
Adrian Calasahan Leegaard Jensen
Adrian Reynolds
Aecio Borba
Alan "DjinnJah" Watson
Alan Douglas
Alan McNevin
Alan Orr
Alasdair Watson
Aldrema
Alessandro Bruschi
Alessandro Rossi
Alex A. Biral
Alex Moran
Alexandru Tsernenku-Kennedy
Alexis Hodieux
Allan Lawrence
Alvaro Saavedra
Ammad Javaid
Anastasios "Cipher" Barbisis
Anders Hole
Anders Holmström
Andrea Buratta
Andrea Migone
Andreas "Sockis" Spovfelt
Andreas "Zanity" Bengtsson
Andrei Antonio Gonzalez Reyes
Andres Villavicencio
Andrew Cain
Andrew 'Whitenoise' Rogers
Andy "Andreas Rayne" Dodd
Ángel Martínez Murillo
Angela van Willhem and the Dark Souls Cabal
Angelithus Berseik
Angus MacThunder Maitre du Force
Anhell change
ANIMAfelis
Anja Rebekka Schultze
Aquarios Victor
Arcade Lancelot de Isengard
Arjun Nagaphui
Arkyn
Arnaud "Khentar" Martin
Arthur Boff
Ashley Williams
Austin Balfour
Azrael von Braunschweig
Balancer
Bardo de valfenda
Barthélemy 'Skender' Alezandaru
Basil "The Q" Kioustelidis
Bekir Cihangir Buyukataman
Ben "Aritei" Bandelow
Ben Liddell
Ben Neilsen
Ben Treeby
Benjamin David Hardy
Bidule
Björn S
bondetamp
Boris Barkovic
Borja García de los Ríos
Brendon 'Ipsisimus' Dare
Brian Nisbet
Bruno "Potato" Oliveira
Bruno Jack
Bruno Pavani Bertolino
Bruno Soares Jardim
Brynjar Sigurðsson
burningcrow
Cabiere
Cael Winters
Calianthe
Cammeron Manski
Candy Oldcar Guadalupe
Canto Mac
Carlo Ledezma
Casidhe Nebulosa, bani Merinita
Cel. Andrew "Folha do Outono" Bates
Che "UbiquitousRat" Webster
Chris "Colin Riley" Schetzle
Chris "The Dragon" Domakinis
Chris & Brooke Haba
Chris Hall
Chris K. Cook
Chris Lupton
Chris Oldgeorge
Christian A.Nord
Christophe Larralde
Christopher Smith
Christopher W Mercer
Cintain
Cirdan Fang
Conrado Foelker
Corenthian
Dan L. Nielsen
Dane Winton
Daniel "Deaddy" Bogdanosi
Daniel "DM" Martins
Daniel "Illuminos" Persson
Daniel Esquizo
Daniel Fernández Rubio
Daniel Lundsby
Daniel Reis Santos
Daniel Tyson
Danni Feveile Börm
Danny James Walsh
Dasyrch
David B. "Capricorne"
David Bergkvist
David 'Doibs' Koch
David Jannati
David PETIOT
David Pírez
David Rose Fraser
David van Nederveen Meerkerk
Decai Virano
Delano "Tagmar"
DEN BITTRA MANNEN
Dhaunae De Vir
Dirk Vanleeuw
Dominick Fazolari Meyer
Dragaz
Drigo De Eraba, The Mind Sculptor
Duke Bobby
dumdrak
Duna
Duncan "Uncle Dunkle" Harris
Durro-Dhun
Edd Glasper
Eddie Berrios
Eder "Lael Oliveira da Cabala Quimera" Barbosa
Edouard Contesse
Eduardo Oliveira Ribeiro de Souza
Edwin Ab'Enion
Egor Borkovskiy
Elisabeth
Elldaryck
Elzo Tovani Benzaquen
Emerson Gois
Êmili "PixelDust" Lemanski
Emiliano Marchetti
Emmanuel "ketzol" LANDAIS
Emmanuelle "Claudia Vonïgner" Nadin
Erik Dörrschuck
Erin Cooke
Esmeralda - The Immortal Empress (Destiny)
Eva Morrissey, Hermes bani Shaea
EviL JoN
Fabiano Silva (Kane X)
Fabio Agripino Fernandes "LoboHunter"
Felipe "Ann" Braga de Oliveira
Felipe Shimabukuro Kai
Felix Hartung
Ferdinand von Schenk
Fernando Autran
Ferret
Filipe e Ana Rosa Cristino
Frank Malcher
Fredrik "Dremacon" Oskarsson
G J O'Neill
G. van der Vegt
Gabriel B P Costa
Gaia King
Galdor Varamir
Gavin Burke
Genesteal
Gert Schepens
Gevaert Gregory
Gregório Tkotz
Guardián de las Sombras Aurora Yangtse, Eutánatos
Guido Gerritzen
Guillaume "Lenny" Asset
Guillaume Paci
Gustavo Soares Pinto
Hachas
Haggai Elkayam
Hal Storey
Hampus Åström
Harma Lever
Hastein le French
Heimi
Henning "The Lieutenant" Hauser
Houston Laredo Forster
Howard Wong
Hyades Luine
Ian Asha
Ibai Saracho
Ideganshaman
Igor Coura de Mendonça
Igor López de Munain
Iker Eginoa 'BatOutOfHell'
In Memory of Olwen Ferrie
Ingo Beyer
ipsi
Ivo de Mooij
J. Zweers
Jackdaw master of shadow
Jackson Blakeney, bani Bonisagus
Jacob Hand
Jair Vianna
James Allen
James Doherty
James Jahn
James Klement
James Wax-Edwards
Jan Heitger
Jared Neveling
Jaroen Kuijper
Jason Lund
Jassin Nasr
Jaustin Sminker
Jay "AkashicJunkie" Lawrence
Jay Steven Anyong
Jean-Baptiste Vlassoff
Jean-Luc DERMINOT
Jennifer Fuss
Jens "Spacejens" Rydholm
Jens Thorup Jensen
Jens Thorup Rasmussen
Jeremy Brown
Jeremy Forsyth
Jez Green
Job Nicolau Travaini
Jody Wood
Joe McNamara
Johan Qvist
Johan Staaf
Johan Utstrand
John Doe
John Lambert
John The Bear Horler
Jokin II the Barbarian bani Euthanatos
Jon McAdoo
Jonas Hansson
Jonathan Marshall
Jordan "MILLANDSON" Millward
Jörg Diener
Jorge Idarraga
Joris Van den Bergh
Jose Luis Perez Zapata

José Manuel Viegas
Joshua Stone
Josue Insua
Juanma Palacios
Juliano de Miranda
Kai Schiefer
Kaisa Vitikainen
Kaltesh
Karl Hagen Mann
Kathandras
Kazz the Voidbringer
Ken Finlayson
Kent Soerenrar
Kernel
Kevin Groeschler
Kevin Guerrero bani Tremere
Kevin Satra Schwarz
Kieran Carder
Kiith
Kim Dong-Ryul
Kithain85
Kokiteno
Konstantinos Bakas
Lachlan Jones
Lars Bengtsson
Lars Berenger
Lars Holgaard
Lars Lauridsen
Lauro Melo dos Santos
Leath Sheales
Lee 'JC Denton' Arthur
Leonard Blyx
Leonardo
Lifestealer
Livia von Sucro
Lorena de Medeiros
Loriana "Elendae" Giuliani
Louis
Lucas Danez
Lucas Salim Sanches
Luis Antonio Avalos
Luiz Carlos Sant'Ana Junior
Luiz Paulo Vieira
Luiz Sócrate
Lunus Flambeau (Sophia Heredia)
Luzbhel
Magister Scholae Burak Türköz bani Janissary, bani Hermes, Keeper of the Sacred Sun and Grand Seer of the Seven Hills (on behalf of Anadolu Hikaye Anlatıcıları)
magus Bernardo Cortizo (PhD-to-be)
Maicon Luiz de Souza
Maja Zaccara
Mandavar der Suchende
Manel Canós Gardener of the Tree
Manfred Krause
Manuel Hora
Mara Cardozo
Marc Bevan
Marc de Diego
Marc-Andre Schick
Marcelão Eugênio Amaral de Faria
Marcelo Andere
Marco Andre Mezzasalma
Marcos "Vrykos" Pereira
Marius B
Mark 'McGig' Berry
Mark S
Markus Wagner
Martin Christensen
Massimiliano "Max" Lorenzin
Mathew Bryan
Mathias Vestergaard Thomsen
Mathieu Guittard
Matt C. & Sabrina R.
Matthaeus Schumacher
Matthew Cramsie
Matthew Wasiak
Matthias Pettersson
Matthias TT Svensson o Sara Törnström
Maus
Michael "Eric Vogue" Brosens
Michael Buchheim
Michael Kelly
Michael Längauer
Michael Murr
Michael Robson
Michael T Rowlands
Michele "MKI" Beltramini
Miguel Esteban Carrero Torres
Mikael Bakkely
Mikael Björk
Monsieur Meuble
Mr.Poke
Murilo "Calech" Sarno
Nadia Cerezo
Nathan "doc" Pasieczny
Nathan North
Nibodhika
Nicholas "Antinomian" Kassavetis
Nicholas Watkins
Nick Ball
Nick Clements
Nick Garfield
Nick Lennon
Nicklas Larsson
Nicolas "Aramis" Castagnet
Nicolás Croce
Nicolas Schiller
Niels Weller
Nighson
Nikolai Steen The Arcane Master
Noam Yanai
Ola Johnsson
Oliver "Ahrimanius" Summers
Oliver Steckmeier
Olman o'Sanctum
Orlando "Billy Tombstone" Borges Botelho
Orpheus Saint-André
Panu Laukkanen
Patrick Mulder
Patrick O'Donnell
Pau Aragonés Illanas
Paul "Zichity-Zach" Stephenson
Paul Ryan
Pawel Daruk
Paweł Paradowski
Pelesit
Per Nyrud Kaas
PERROT Claude-Arnaud
Peter Endean
Peter Malmo Lange
Peter Merkel
Petri Wessman
Phil Burge
Phil Masters
Philip K. Creswell
Philipp Hinderer
Philipp Simon Kausch
Pierre 'Victor' Brun
Pitpipo
Printkithbookboggan
Prof Mordecai
Prof. PhD. MSc. Electrical Engineer Erol Mazhar Aksoy, member of the Utopians group and The Society of Ether University Research Fellow (on behalf of Anadolu Hikaye Anlatıcıları)
Prometheus Hermeticus
Pyros Vivere Flambonis
Pyxis Corvus
Quentin Besnehard
Rafael "Kaichkull" Mastromauro
Rafael Brasilio Grotti da Silva
Rafael Cruz
Rafael e Luciana Devera
Rafael Marques de Albuquerque
Rafael Miney
Rafael Rodrigues
Ralf Schienhammer
Rasmus Lyngkjær
Rémi DESSY
Rene Reinhold Schallegger
Rex Walker of the Breakfast Cabal
Rhodry Castle
Ricardo "Sardonis" Penteado
Richard 'Vidiian' Greene
Ricky Veale
Rivina "The Laughing Inferno" Heartwood
Robert Bushell
Robert C. Allen
Roberto Hiroshi Kina Filho
Roberto Trinkel
Robin "Jarval" Farndon
Rod "Lokison" Mendes
Roger Meier
RPG - Passas
Salem Pulsifer
Sarah T. Carter
Scott Mullock
Sean Winship
Seth Hartley
Shane Mclean
Shasta
Shenzoar
Shosuro
Silvio Herrera Gea
Simon
Simon Andrews
Simon Chadwick
Simon York
Sireyi Valyenya
So Happy I Could Die
Somalucard
Spi
Stefan Lundsby
Stefano Monachesi
Steffen Schwertfeger
Steffen Thorbjørnson
Steffie de Vaan
Stephen Birks
Stephen Briggs
Stephen Joseph Ellis
Stephen McElvaney
Stephen Nurse
Steve (Erekosë) Edwards
Stuart "Pattern Spider" Adam
Sylvain "OgGy" Tanguy
Sylvio S Maia conde
Tácito "Tremere" Reis
Tahd Inskepp
Talita "Setheus" Amaral
Tamara Fendez
Teemu Lehmusmies
The First and Forsaken Lon-Lon
The Mordak
Theo Milliner
Thiago Gonçalves
Thomas DELICOURT
Thomas Maund
Tiago Marinho
Tiffany Korta
Timothy Mushel
Tito G. S. de Aguiar
Toine
Tom "Sagacious Paunch" Webster
Tom Coleman
Tommy Midttveit
Torben Lindqvist
Tor-Eilif Hargaut
Totenrand
Trajan Hagen Kober
Trickster
Tristan Lhomme
Valerio Paladino
Varvara Kromiko
Vegard Kivle
Vicious Whisper
Vincent "Victorien LOYOLA" Mora
Vincent Lhote-Hatakeyama
Virgule "Mafalda" Gaspard
Vitor Gabriel "Viktorius" Etcheverry
Vladimir "Devereaux" Dzundza Whitt
Will Inskip
William Huntingdon
William Lamming
William Rullenraad

Willy kaceres
Wong Lok Yau, Yoana
Wyld
Yann Krehl
Yasmijn Jagtenberg
yes
yugo4k
Yzabel Ginsberg
Zander Catta Preta

Ataru Alyna Moroboshi of LoMarin's Irregulars, Starshia-Verbana Keeper to the key of the Library of Alexandria
Adam Caverly and David Ghosh
Alexey Rybak, Oleg Krapilsky
Alone Dillon , Emily Scott
Andrew Bailey, James Surano
Angelo Frost, Arthur Drake
Anna Bradley, Berek Marcus
Ashton & Lancer
Austr Ball, Enadiate
Bryan J. Dolan & Blake Mclean
Chris & JoAnn Alexander
Chris B, Greg M
Christopher C. Basoco and Mikel Smothermon
Clayton Thereaux, Eli Arel
Damien Allen and Isabella "Sorri" Sensi
Daniel Peterson and Melissa Goodyer
Danielle Oremus and Zachariah Lint
Deanna Rossi, Pat Gibson
Dippy; Conner
Dr Gideon Pyro, and The Shaper of Flesh
Dr. Mark Kellett Darker Days Radio
Drew "Schwimmwagen" Dietz, Shuniqua "MadLyric" Dietz
Elizabeth Vargo, Jack Daw
Shawn "Tezbak" Warren, Working Arist
Fox Circe, metaphorge
François Labelle, Ghislain Hivon
Fyrestorm and Silicone Reboot
Guy-Samuel F. Dussault, Daniel Giguere
Iain 'Hanrahan' McStuart, Gilles 'Red Hand' Dubois
Ignacio J. Gallegos
J. B. Altepeter & A. C. Elliott
Jarrod of Usher, Jareth Mercury Desidario Thorn
Jason "Jadasc" Schneiderman, Galen & Esther Brownsmith
Jason Van Pelt, Ho-yin Ko
Jeffrey S. Leger and Thad Green
Jesse James Grice Jr. and "Chance" Gawain Lancelot Du Lac Jean LaFitte
Jonathan Weber, Michael Crary
Joseph M. Jankowski Michael T. Prokop
Kainus Galbani, Capt. Leblanc
Kelley Pennington and Nicholas Radcliffe
Kelly Cashion, Alex Beigh
Miguel Ludert, Frank Paul Courtell
Mnerillenith, Gideon and Kizzy Puck
Nicholas D. Dragisic, Tim Prisching
Patricia Wright, William C. Walker III
Roy Barea, bani Verbenae & Melissa "Shadow cat" Gonzalez Trelles, bani Shaea
Salvador White, Daniel Rachels
Samuel Tesla & Erica Tesla Scathaigh; Mystica Void-Eye
Sigma Star, Ben Lyons
Stephanie Fuller, Jonathan David Kaipainen Gibbons
Steven Bobula, Betty J. Osthoff
The Doctor [412/724/301/703/415] bani Virtual Adepts; Eric the Poet
Timothy Gousie, Mitzi Gousie
Twitcher Bears, Bryan O'Gillan

Martijn "Malas the Shield" Haan; Ivo "Gregorius the Sword" Goudzwaard
Ádamo and Mariana Barth
Alexander Kratochwill, Heike Vollnberg
AXEL GOTTELAND and CASSANDRE
Ben May, Panagiotis "Old Man" Papakos
Charley Gustavsson, Henrik Lindén
Damian O'Dea, Emma O'Dea
Daniel Connors, Lucas Swanson
Diego Sousa and Alesson Moura
Eleanor Mae Kelly & Aaron Jacob Kelly
Harold Bambridge Sr. and Harold Bambridge III
Iván "El Can" de Neymet; Federico "Mr Fancy Pants" Eriksen
Jakob Kiilerich and Magister Thomas of the LTG Roleplaying Club
Jürgen Mayer, Ingmar Juhnke
Lars Pedersen
Legr
Locke Bendeckar
Luciana Nogueira Soares, Carolina Voigt
Magus Ernesto Gonzales de Navarre, Adept Major bani Quaesitor bani Ordo Hermeticum; Elias (Karl Klyvansikte) Savetun
Martin Insaurralde, Nicolas Briozzo and Sebastian Costas
Matías Veny Coca, Iñaki Iglesias Cancio
Matt Lyons; Kayt Armstrong
Matthew Sanderson & Jamie Jordan Lee
Mikkel Lund & Andreas "ESSO" Jensen
Milosz Nawrat; Midian
Nikolas Koumoundouros, Stathis Karapanos
Paige Oakley, Kenneth Lemieux
peter peretti, Katharina Krovat
Rappeler Orosháza, Asoka Chendraikhar
Rémi "Batronoban" Teulière and David Santiago
Saray Lorenzo Nieves/ Mikel Montero Matellanes; Yes.
Sebastian "Madison" Gift, Simon Dietsch
Stéphan "Dante" Alomène and Christophe "Nashan" Claude
Tiemi Hashizume and Viviane L. Costa
Tristan Sandras, Fondation Nemo

Andre Sisneros, Gamescape
North, P. H. Wise, Jessa "Demon Cat" Denmark, Mark Stone
Ed Sloman, Games & Stuff, Bluharlequin. Belltower Minion, Maroon Hairworm
I'm Board! Games & Family Fun
Jason Seitz, Wizard Asylum, Mark Garbrick, Jennifer Bedell, Shane Ivins
Oliver ''Madmenquill'' Blais, Dominic Parent, Guillaume ''Punch'' Senechal, Christian ''Lucius'' Morin, Junior
To Cecil Carter from his friends, Wyld Windancer, Shawn Auguston, Darwin Cooper, Brett Howell
Xin Lao Qi Dao Long, the Dragon-brother Wanderer (Wu Lung/Dreamspeaker), Abril "Luna" Segovia, Bruja (Verbena), Michel "Nex" Jones (Adepto Virtual), Diego "Edge" Cota (Virtual Etherite) Omar Ivan Toledano Landeros.

Brett Bozeman
Eidan Rodriguez, Anatole Serial, Vania M. Luna, Reiner Vaniem
Rakot XIV, Bicho 75
Grymme, Doctor Scarlett, Mr Freak, Doctor Wylde, Lord Black Stone
Justin "KakarisMaelstrom" Fitzgerald, Kali "Evonine" Fitzgerald, Zoe "TwilightPonyLove" Fitzgerald, Kira Fitzgerald, BoxCatGames.com
Nutters McGee, Jason "Ogre" Gandy, Allan "Kid A" Lazenby, Dade "I TOLD you I was a mage!" Thompson, McKenzie "Dae" Smith
Vortex Game Center, Alvaro "Sixaola" Madrigal, Eduardo Salazar Casasa, Sebastián Urbina, Thalyann and Elrick from Costa Rica

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Jérome Bianquis; Arthur Noseda; Jonathan Churin; Gatien Billon-Maurin; Trollune; Charles Trécourt; Louis Trécourt; Yannick Peyrède; Spirit of Chantelouve
Petros Panagiotidis, Giorgos Stoupkas, Manolis Kemerlis, Charidimos Brintakis, Nikiforos Axaopoulos

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"Marcos Rivas Villa-Lobos Ramírez, Chief Metallurgist to King Charles V of Spain", "Emmanuel Torres bani Tytalus, bani Hermes of The Underground Train Cabal", "Gerrard Fireseed", "Leopoldo Monsivais Carrillo, Cult of Extasis", "Max Clow Reed, bani Ex miscellanea"
Adrian Praetorius, Stefan Faber, Stefan Kletke, Franz Janson, Patric Götz
Liam Young, Zhubeen Tavakoli-Keshe, Andrew 'Standing-Stone' Smith, Richard Rae, Michael Lamb
Ngel "Orokin" Stamatiadis, Ioannis "What Do You Mean?" Logovitis, George "The Akashic" Papageorge, Tassos "Theios Acastos" Tassopoulos, Nikiforos "Dr. Bedlam" Vlachos, Manolis "Great Worm" Skoulikas
Oliver Schuster, Jonas Rosenfeldt, Marco Klomfas, Karen Schuster, Domaene Teutoburg
Revered Chantry of the Sacred Heap&Malt in Honour of our dear Lady Bavaria, Munich: Patrick O'Connor bani Flambeau; Mita Izumi (NOT Kim!); Dr. Francis Nightingale, Sc.D.; Merodin Ryan Flair; Eadee

Initiate

Balyrion
Ben
Brandon H
Capt. Phil Broughton of the Sidereal Strike Force
Captain Button
Christopher "Walks A Beat" Greer
Daedalus Tychus
Dave Thommas
David Merrifield
Dean Rogers
Dylan Spencer
Ethan Zimmerman
Gorham
Jacob "Flock of" Segal
James Cory Fudge Alston
Jim Tetrick
Kent Frazier
Kurt DeBellis
Lee Sims
Malak Arioch Lanfear
Matt "aRJay" Reynolds
Matthew Walker
Maya Novak
Michael T.J. Pippin
Notivago
Patrick R Venable
Peter Dean
Raul Urbina
Remi Letourneau
Rob Hall
Robert Montgomery
Ryan Michael McBawn
Saif Ansari
th' buni
The Mouse
Zax the Divine
Zurotzu

0xDEADBEA7
5p3ctor
Adam Brown
Adam Lichter
Alex Danley
Alexandre Simard
Alexi Kadanov
Alisha Walton
Altrus Torfellen
Anthony E. Harbo
Anthony J. Pirri
Arius Hephaestus Aetnaeus, bani Verditius
Arthur McMahon
Benjamin Holt
Benjamin Houchard
Benoit Attinost
Bill Patino
Billie Loves Brian
Brahm Dorst
Brian Davis
Bryan Pearson
Charan DuFrançois
Chase Bacetich
Chris 'Errant' Harper
Chris Landmark
Chris Stewart
Christian Lacroix
Christopher Adragna
Christopher Alan Slater
Christopher R. Wain
CJ Roberts
Colin R. Jones
Colin Urbina
Connor Fraser
Corvis Munin
Corwin Barrington
Crusher-of-Cities
Daniel Anctil
Daniel Deschenes
Dave Arcs
David "Rook" Broussard
David Connell Olsher
David Mortensen
David Starner
David Sycamore
Donald R. Clarke
Donovan Mays
Dr. Alexander Bustos
Dylan Cockell
Eric Aubey
Eric Castle III
Erik Daguerre
Erin Meyers
Erin Riggsmith
G.C.N.E.J
Galen
Garron Lewis
Gordon Alexander
Grace Evans
He-Zin Kwon
J. Quincy Sperber
James Vacca
James VanderHaeghe
Jared "OniKage" Weber-Spencer
Jared Van Meter bani Hermeticum
Jason Ramboz
Jay A Miller
JeFF Croft
Jeremy "Undead Scottsman" Dunn
Jessica & Christopher
Jim Urquhart
Joe Giammarco
John Endicott
John 'Enigma' Foster
John Lord
Joseph Soloway
Josh Fohrman
Joshua Wilson
Justin Buckley
Keith W. Davis
Kelly J Clark
Kevin Lawrence
Leo Starwind
Lucas Fitzgerald
Luis Gomez
Malk Coord
Mark E Elsinger
Martin "Grizzly" Lagace
Mason Maxwell
Matt Rock
Matt Schmidt, Order of Hermes - House Ex Miscellania
Matthew Mitchell
Matthew Webb
Matthias Lamonte bani Flambeau
MaxMahem
Michael J. Hehn bani Sons of Ether " The Hehnious One"
Mike "DaiTengu" Miller
Mike Solomon
Nancy Calvert-Warren
Nate Miller
Nick Burtner
Nick Edwardsen
Nick Fury
Nikhil Daniel Majumdar
Nixelleborus
Noah J. Nelson
Owen Thomas Wright
Patrick Ley
Paul Thorgrimson, Akashic Brotherhood, Old Buddhist Crab
Porthos
Richard Andre Dagenais
Rob Bessey
Robert Gilson
Rocco
Scary Day
Selene O'Rourke
Seth Johnson
Shado
Shane Rose
Shiara Chow
Sodocam
Solly Ross
Stephen Asbell
Stephen Shulusky
Steve S
T.R. Fullhart
T2
Tetsuo
The Chained Crescent
Thomas Langenbach
Timothy Cook
Vincent Marrow
Wes Gideon
William "The Midgar Demon" Smith
Wolfdawg
X&
yes
Zalabar

Alart Heihael
Aleksi Airaksinen
Bokshik Kim
Christine Jones
Fang Tzu-Ping
Gando
Han Shan
Helio Rodrigues
Jeppe Nybo
Kim Wincen
Lucas Bonsignore-Boisset
Matt Wood
Nikodemus Siivola
Richard Drysdale
Stefan Schasse

AKEZ Zwol
Alexander Morozov
Allessandro Peres
André Reis Sakaya
Andy Jackson
Anthony "Selketh" Dennetiere
Bastien Daugas
Belinda Kelly
Bénédict Louis Stanislas de Montmorency-Laval
Chris Santos
Christopher 'eChryxius' Wai
Demian
Dr. Andine Paradox
Dr. Dorian Graywood
Dr. med. Elaine Barreaux
Eric Sorg
Fabián Álvarez / (Club Mecatol Rex / Green Dog Studio, Madrid, Spain)
Francesco Tarasconi
Gareth T. Roberts
Gobbos
Graeme Foote
Gunnar Olai Dahle Sivertsen
Hugh O'Connor
Johannes von Stein
José C. Delgado R.
Juan José López-Ayerbe
Julio Rodrigues
Lee Dong-youn
Luna Lepus
Marcia Keglevich
Mario S Camillo
Mark Pryce
Martin C. Howard
Mathias Bøgehøj Møller
Matt Timm
Matteo Cesari
Matthew Gollschewski
Mattia "Ebrithil" Pellin
Michael Eringsmark
Michael Fellows
Michel Foisy

Mike Francis
Mikko Rautalahti
Neil Glassford
Noita Joikura
Pål Wilhelmsen
Paul "Vesta" Williams
Paul Shawley
Pedro Augusto Rodrigues
PESSIOT ROMAIN
Rhys Fisher
Robbie Eberhardt
Robert "Cryn" Schlesier
Rodrigo Fontana
Sidewinder
Stephane "FRLinux" Dudzinski
The Horsemen
Thiago Fazolari Meyer
Thomas Ollier
Tillan
Torben van Hees
Trilly Chatterjee
Ville Takanen
William Wagner Moraes Artero

Disciple

Adept Major Michael Kently
bani Merinita, Deacon of
the Cabal of Black Roses &
Sunblessed Heir to the Blood of
Dreaming Feathers
Alun Powell
Graftina Hadna Haada
Hyeonseung "Devil Giraffe" Lee
Jason Place
Kairam b. Ahmed Hamdan
Michael V. Roberts
Pedro Santos
Professor Utopia
Ryan Summers
Victoria Ashley-Croft
Bruno "Jamie McCallister, bani
Verditius" Filipe
Desmond Woolston
Eric Smailys
George Matzen
Khaos Farbauti Ibn Oblivion
Matthew Whitt
Nik 'Tungus Grumph' May
Rel Zhirah
Ryan "The Peregrine" Hefley
Xavier Durand

Charles Siegel and Celia Rae
Felipe "Ditrian" Novaes
Michael Fitzpatrick

Adept

Bentley W. Chism
Cassie Collins
Drew "Industrial Scribe" Scarr
Emilio J. "Krusmir" Sánchez-
Sierra
Eryk Gustavson
Frédéri "Volk Kommissar
Friedrich" POCHARD
Iain MacPhee
Lawjick
Mike Ruch
Robert Biskin
Silvia Solange Mantilla

Anton A. Adam
Ben Birk
DocEZ
Dr Simon Exton
Fox
Henry Kay
Henry R. Moore III
James:Eidolon
Joshua McKenna
Karl "Aedh" Lerman
Karl Manheim
Kendrick Hough
Lindsey R Douglas IV
Mario Meo
Matthew McGuire
Michael "Xero" Ilott
Mizuho Shiraishi
Nicolas Szakacs
Nikolaus Poenisch
Parzival
Paulo Daniel Salles Ramos
Spike, and his Avatar Rajamal

Q-Prime

(O°-°)O Konta O(°-°O)
--==5T4T1C==--
A. Treamayne
Adam Doochin
Adam Whitcomb
Adrian Dopazo
Adrian Marangoni
Agent Max "Stoney" Stilwell
Alain MORANGE
alcethenecromancer
Alec Humphrey
Alexander Probst
Alexandre Kerscher Souza
Andefious Oldenson
Anders Silverplats
András Babós 'Babszem'
Andreas Reck
Andrés Higua. "Endymion
d'Lume", Magi Tremere.
Andrew Augstine DiNovo
Andrew J Gordon
Andrew MacLennan
Andrew W. Jones
Andrew Waterfall
Andrew Wilson
Ariel Kaiser
Az'zametry
Bael the Cruel
Baughb the Bard
Ben Baccaert
Ben Kesner
Benedict Shek
Benjamin Loy
Benn Grant
Bernd Linke, Michael Gebhard
Blake Deakins
Blake Elder
Bob Stauffer
Boris CHOTEAU
Brett Easterbrook
Bryce Undy
Bryn Celyn
Cameron "Corax" Harrell
Caroline Hammer
Cedar Blake
Charles Sherwood Morrill
Chris Daher
Chris Eggers
Chris Sutton
Christoph Meiselbach
Christopher Gunning
Christopher Pallante
Cody Risberg
Conrad Julian White
Corinna Vigier
Coyotekin
D L HECTOR
Daniel "Sir Whiteout" Guariento
Daniel "Hears-The-Wind"
Fishman
Daniel Gochnauer
Daniel Haddon
Daniel Ley
Daniel Niekerk
Dantae Black
Dave Brookshaw
Dave Meigs
David 'dj' Coleman (Time Bomb)
David Lucardie
David William Kaufman II
Dawid "Dievas" Wojcieszynski
Débora "Tia Deb" Brellenthin
Dee Taylor
Derek "Pineapple Steak" Swoyer
Derek Grimm
Dimitrios 'Archmage' Xanthakis
Diogenes "Lycaen" Silva
Doctor Alfons Von Grawitz Ph.D.
Dolan Ross Scherfel
Donald M. Dillon
Donny Mason
Dr. Paul Hauser bani Quaesitor
DreamingLilliane
Drew Clowery
Dreyus Nox
Eduardo A. Magdalena Aguin
Emerrin Whitefoot
Emma McAllister
Erasculio
Eric Baker
Eric Lee Thurston
Eric Manschot
Eric Mersmann
Eric Vogel (Joe Edwards)
Erik Bergesen
Erik E. Mederos
Ernie Sawyer
Evan Hughes
Evelyne Schreiner
Father Eric Pensman
Feian
Filip Van Huffel
Footnotegirl
Frank "Anaximander"
McCormick
Frédéri "Volk Kommissar
Friedrich" POCHARD
GH Trace Webster III
Graham Starfelt
Greg Phillips
Gregory Faber
Harald Hellerud
Heinrich Krebs
Ian Dominey
Ian Ellis
Ian Hamon

Ian MacRae
Ian Price
In memory of John Depp
Integra van Hellsing
Ironnick
Isaac "Stack Trace" Linkletter
J. W. Bennett
Jacob Gann
Jacques Barcia
James Heche
James Vogel
Jan-Willem Kaagman
Jared Slupsky
Jared Wadsworth
Jason "Doc" Haddix
Jason 'Prospero' Pennel
Jay Page
Jaye Barnhart
Jeff
Jeremiah L Schwennen
Jeremy "Vaydyn" Cue
Jeremy Thomas, Bani Ecstasy
Jessica Lilith Darke - Widderslainte Adsinistrani
Jimi Hendricks
John "Dade" Morris
John "Why do I always get covered in Ick?" Murphy
John A W Phillips
John Doe
Johnny Bibz
Jon B. De Gopegi
Jonathan "flymolo" Grimm
Jonathon Stout
Joseph Bowman & Lindsay Fairbairn
Julián Navarro
Julie shamas and Greg Tait
Kaoleth
Ken-loves-Princess-Sandy
Kevin Chauncey
Kieran Hughes
Kougen Nakahito (Kai)
Kyle Henderson
Lace
Laughing Magi
Laurent Gruchet
Leo Knøsgaard Heby
Lin Wyeth
Loki63
Lord Shaidin of the Three-fold Path
Luke K. Johnson
Luke Smith
Manuel Cadiz
Marc Blinn
Marcos Almeida Leite Bomfim
Marcus and Leslie Arena
Mark "Merlin Mitnick" Roy
Mark Hope
Mark Lazure
Mark P. Redford
Mark Pavlou
Mark Smith
Martin Goodson
Martine Loncan
Matthew "The Gentleman Gamer" Dawkins
Matthew G Payton
Matthew Palsson
Mehmet "Rakshasa" Ortaç on behalf of the Anadolu Storytellers
Merick the Blue aka "Dark_Jedi70"
Michael Brewer
Michael Scholz
Miguel Reyes
Morgan Nichols
Morten Schei aka Dracono Twilightwalker
Nate Kelly
Nathan & April Matz
Nelson Candanedo
Nicholas A. Tan
Nicholas 'Doomcarver' Lelos
Nicholas Huntington
Nik "Miranda Forrest" May
Nikolas Faust
Patrick Pocher
Paul 'Five Eyes' Harries
Paul Marshall
Perrin "Quillion Fuller" Rynning
Piere Le Chuck
Polly Parker
Prof. Nicholas Atreides
Randy L Jeffries Jr
Redfuji6
Renan Cesar Palomino
Richard Forster
Richard Libera
Richard Z. Troester
Rob Collins
Rob Sharp
Robert "Grendelki" Beasley
Robert "Voudoun" Lewis
Robert B. LeMoyne
Robert Flinchum
Roberto Pedro Antón
Roberto Salles
Rodolfo Schmauk
Rodolphe Duhil
Rory "Muggle" McIntosh
Rory 'TrippyHippy' Hughes
Rose Bailey
Russell Pancoast
SaintOn
Sam Myatt
Samuel Hoskins
Sarek
Scott A. Peters
Seana McGuinness
Sebastian N. Behrndtz
Sebastian Pusch
Shad Scarboro
Shawn P
Sicill Col
Sifu Dustin Rahn
Sigurd Gunnvaldr (Dragos)
Spyder na Talesin
Steven Hykes
Steven Lau
Syal
Talamond Majibon
Thibaut Gaillard
Thomas Scott
Thomas Webb - "My name is Thomas, dreamer of dreams: Look on my stories, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Thrice Great Guilherme Pinto
Tim "Noisecode" Blackstone
Tobias Schulte-Krumpen
Tony Elaluf
Tony Patterson
Torgeir Johansen
Trista and Daniel Robichaud, A.R. Nakama and Shannon "Haz" Harrower-Nakama
Troy Lenze
Troy Wiersma
vincent furstenberger
Vladislav Lazarov
Whismerhill
Will "scifantasy" Frank
William F Scrimsher III
William McBane
Wyrdrune
Xane the Black
Xiu Tong
Yann Abaziou
Zachary Thomas Tyler, Primordial Dreamspeaker Baruti/Taftâni Kahin
Zero Ninja

Master

Bellona Wingvane
Martin A. McDowell
Robert Stephen "Fitzgerald" Fulkerson
Roxxah Teel
Timur Hahn - Magister Mundi
Matthias von Eisenberg bani Flambeau

20th Anniversary Edition

MAGE: THE ASCENSION

Name:	**Nature:**	**Affiliation:**
Player:	**Demeanor:**	**Sect:**
Chronicle:	**Essence:**	**Concept:**

Attributes

Physical

Strength _____ OOOOO
Dexterity _____ OOOOO
Stamina _____ OOOOO

Social

Charisma _____ OOOOO
Manipulation _____ OOOOO
Appearance _____ OOOOO

Mental

Perception _____ OOOOO
Intelligence _____ OOOOO
Wits _____ OOOOO

Abilities

Talents

Alertness _____ OOOOO
Art _____ OOOOO
Athletics _____ OOOOO
Awareness _____ OOOOO
Brawl _____ OOOOO
Empathy _____ OOOOO
Expression _____ OOOOO
Intimidation _____ OOOOO
Leadership _____ OOOOO
Streetwise _____ OOOOO
Subterfuge _____ OOOOO

Skills

Crafts _____ OOOOO
Drive _____ OOOOO
Etiquette _____ OOOOO
Firearms _____ OOOOO
Martial Arts _____ OOOOO
Meditation _____ OOOOO
Melee _____ OOOOO
Research _____ OOOOO
Stealth _____ OOOOO
Survival _____ OOOOO
Technology _____ OOOOO

Knowledges

Academics _____ OOOOO
Computer _____ OOOOO
Cosmology _____ OOOOO
Enigmas _____ OOOOO
Esoterica _____ OOOOO
Investigation _____ OOOOO
Law _____ OOOOO
Medicine _____ OOOOO
Occult _____ OOOOO
Politics _____ OOOOO
Science _____ OOOOO

Spheres

Correspondence _____ OOOOO
Entropy _____ OOOOO
Forces _____ OOOOO
Life _____ OOOOO
Matter _____ OOOOO
Mind _____ OOOOO
Prime _____ OOOOO
Spirit _____ OOOOO
Time _____ OOOOO

Advantages

Backgrounds

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Other Traits

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

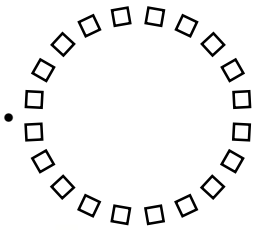
Arete

O O O O O O O O O O

Willpower

O O O O O O O O O O
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised	-0	☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Experience

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Other Traits

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Rotes

Focus

Wonders

Name: _____
Description: _____

Name: _____
Description: _____

Name: _____
Description: _____

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Cost	Flaw	Bonus

History

Goals/Destiny

Description

Age: _____
Apparent Age: _____
Sex: _____
Ethnicity: _____
Hair: _____
Eyes: _____
Height: _____
Weight: _____

Gear & Equipment

Combat

Weapon/Attack	Diff.	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip

I tell you this: We are Divinity.

Reality is ours to bend. To subvert. To command.
We have that power - all of us.

Not everyone knows what to do with it, or uses it well.
Most of us never realize just what it is we are or how much we can do.

Those of us who do... well, some of us are monsters.
Manipulators. Parasites. Tyrants. Fanatics.

And the rest of us never see that monster in our own mirror, only in the reflections of those folks who are not "us."

Here's the truth, though: We are ALL "us." We are ALL gifted,

We can ALL change the world. Most of us remain asleep.

A blessed few Awaken. Fewer still use that power wisely.
And none without consequences.

And so, reality is up for grabs. Where do you stand?

And will you Fall... or Ascend?

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